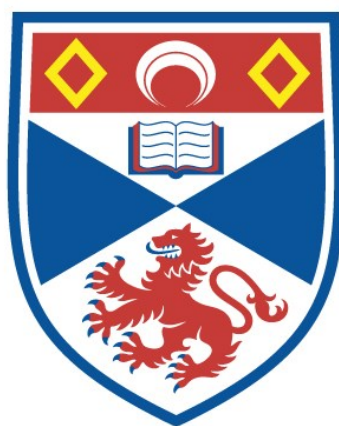


# CONSTRUCTING GENDER IN CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGY

Aleksandar Bošković

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



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University of St. Andrews

St. Andrews, September 1996



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# Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which gender and contemporary anthropology interact, with the special emphasis on the areas frequently referred to as “poststructuralist” or “postmodern.” More specifically, I look at one aspect which postmodern approaches and feminist theories have in common: questioning of the dominant narratives. This questioning then leads through a series of constructed realities (or *hyperrealities*) to the realization of the importance of the concept of difference(s) in all its aspects.

The ethnographic examples are from the Republics of Slovenia (primarily concerning feminist groups and scholars) and Macedonia (the region of Prespa, in the southwestern part of the country). In both countries the fall of communism has created a sort of a power hiatus, filled with questions about identity, the future and ways to organize the newly emerging societies (since both countries became independent in 1991). In that regard, both countries are *hyperreal*. After the Introduction, I outline the debates surrounding “postmodern” approaches in anthropology, different theoretical assumptions, as well as the area(s) where these approaches can inform anthropological research. I start with the overview of the working definitions of “postmodernism” and the attitudes towards it that characterize current anthropological theory, continuing with what I regard to be the most illustrative examples of it being misunderstood and misrepresented, and concluding with the meeting point of postmodern anthropology and the study of gender. In the following chapters I present the results of my field research in Macedonia and in Slovenia, concluding with the theoretical implications of contemporary anthropological approaches to the study of gender, as well as the reasons for presenting it as basically a social construct. In Conclusion, I point out at the fact that gender studies seem to be the only area where postmodernism and anthropology interact in the most positive way, primarily through the full exploration of the concept of difference(s).

(i) I, Aleksandar Boskovik, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

date 06/09/1996 signature of candidate \_\_\_\_\_

(ii) I was admitted as a research student in October, 1993 and as a candidate for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy in social anthropology in October, 1993; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1993 and 1996.

date 06/09/1996 signature of candidate \_\_\_\_\_

(iii) I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

date 6-9-96 signature of supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

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*za moite tetki, Rodna i Mare,  
mome bratu Draganu,  
svome starom ratnom drugu Miranu*

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When someone is honestly 55% right, that is very good and there is no use wrangling. And if someone is 60% right, it is wonderful, it is great luck, and let him thank God. But what is to be said about 75% right? Wise people say this is suspicious. Well, and what about 100% right? Whoever says he is 100% right is a fanatic, a thug, and a most dangerous man.

(an old Jew from Galicia, from Milosz 1953, slightly modified)

# Introduction:

## For an anthropology of difference

I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing, coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they, all of them, all of those that merge, those that past, those that never meet, and nothing else, yes, something else, that I'm something quite different, a quite different thing.

(Beckett 1958: 386)

## EXERGUE: ON VOICES

The voices in the following text are meant to represent some of the opinions related to the study of gender in contemporary anthropology. Of course, their very selection is to a large extent a matter of personal choice,<sup>1</sup> just as it is the case with the topics covered. Although I have tried to let the authors speak with their own voice (in their own words) as much as possible, again, this is basically my interpretation (one of the many possible ones) of their voices. My personal construction of their meanings.<sup>2</sup>

My own position in the whole postmodernist/anthropological debate is somewhat determined by my background: growing up with a healthy dose of scepticism<sup>3</sup> so typical of South European/Mediterranean cultures, as well with the almost complete disregard for any kind of authority.<sup>4</sup> I grew up bilingual and

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<sup>1</sup> This personal choice is, however, determined by the fact that gender and postmodernism are important issues in anthropology, and that postmodern approaches can help one situate gender within contemporary anthropology — the fact that I intend to prove in the course of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that this is a personal construction does not automatically invalidate other personal constructions on the same subject. The main point that makes this construction special for me is the sense of authorship, the fact that it has been constructed by me.

<sup>3</sup> Living in a few Western cultures (USA, UK) in recent years, I have realized that the great majority of people do not regard scepticism as something very positive. Sceptical attitudes tend to be equated with the muddling up of otherwise clear situations — not dissimilar to my experience of the communist authorities in former Yugoslavia and their reactions to critical intellectual discussions. (The big difference being that this negative attitude in former communist countries was imposed from *above* — by the holders of power — while in the Western societies that I am aware of it seems to come from *below* — from “the people” themselves, *without actually being imposed on them*.) This is not the understanding of scepticism that I have (and share with many people from where I come) — that is where the quotation from the beginning of Milosz’s *Captive Mind* comes in. I would be quite happy to be 55% right in my thesis. 60% would almost constitute a perfection.

<sup>4</sup> Although I do not intend to discuss the notion of authority here, I have to note that the popular (Western) understanding of the respect for authority in South European/Mediterranean cultures unjustifiably equates respect within the family (which is also to a great extent earned) with

bicultural, so the notion of plurality (of more than one culture, language, possible interpretation, voice, etc.) in all its aspects was part of my everyday experience throughout my life. The part of the world where I come from (Republic of Macedonia, former SFR Yugoslavia, Balkans) is highly unstable (politically, historically, etc.) — in this century alone these territories have been occupied three times, and Belgrade (the city where I have spent most of my adult life) has been razed to the ground 32 times in the more than 2000 years of its history (twice in this century alone).

Therefore, I simply do not have a notion of stability and order, so common in most of the Western European cultures, with their institutions and traditions of political life going back for decades and perhaps centuries. The notion of flux, instability, constant change (involving total destruction) and uncertainty is something that comes “naturally” to me — but I am well aware how frightening these notions might be for someone raised to think in specifically well-determined and well-defined categories. (I am not implying here that all change is the same — but I do feel at ease with the notion of constant change.) What is today the Republic of Macedonia, was occupied throughout most of its history, its language was suppressed or banned for several decades in this century (1912-1944), and it still practically banned among the Slav Macedonian population in Northern Greece. People need to constantly readjust in order to survive.

In that sense, someone could probably define me as a person reasonably close to postmodernism<sup>5</sup> — a kind of postmodernism that questions its own premises as well as any other grand narrative (in Lyotard's sense of the word).<sup>6</sup> Certainly, postmodernism was (and still is) the medium of expressing hope in the former Yugoslavia (cf. Longinovic 1994). From the early 1980s, to use Longinovic's example, a group of young people around the journal *Vidici* in Belgrade started questioning the technologies of power. Although no specific mention was made of the communist rulers of Yugoslavia at the time, the threat to their established authority was recognized and this group was quickly shut out of the journal.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the 1980s and in the 1990s, many brave people were trying to expose the fallacies and dangers of the rising tide of nationalist hysteria. Many of them were simply labelled "postmodernist" and shut out of political and public life (intellectuals never had any serious impact in Balkan societies anyway), but when the savage war in what used to be Yugoslavia erupted, the same people (including others, with different theoretical perspectives) organized themselves as the only significant intellectual opposition to the ideology of local warlords (who happen to be well established politicians), and

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respect for institutions (Church, local government, state, etc.). These are not the same. Someone can respect authority within the family unit without necessarily respecting religious or political authorities. Although in theory these concepts of authority may appear to be the same, in "real life" they are completely set apart.

<sup>5</sup> Watching from the sidelines, or just reading this — we can never see ourselves as clearly as other people can. I do not see myself as "post," "pre," or in any sense "modern" — just as someone trying to make some sense out of the world in which he happens to be living.

<sup>6</sup> For the definition of grand narrative, I refer to J. M. Bernstein: "Grand narratives, or meta-narratives as they are sometimes called, are second order narratives which seek to narratively articulate and legitimate some concrete first-order practices or narratives" (in Wood 1991: 102).

<sup>7</sup> "Also, many of the strategies developed by the *Vidici* group are presently an inspiration for a new generation of dissidents under the current Serbian regime, which most prominently includes persons associated with Radio B-92, the weekly magazine *Vreme*, the Center for Anti-War Actions, and the Belgrade Circle" (Longinovic 1994: 121).

organizations such as the Belgrade Circle arose as a result of such an effort.<sup>8</sup> These people put their careers and their lives at risk by standing up and reacting to madness and violence. Reading Baudrillard and opposing the nationalist/bloodthirsty madness goes together quite well in the former Yugoslavia. From this perspective, I do find some criticisms of postmodernism as “reactionary” (or politically quietist) almost incomprehensible.<sup>9</sup> For how can something that questions all authority and all the basis for authority (including, in a nice hyperreal twist, its own authority to table these questions!), something that questions all the metanarratives (including itself as one of them!) be labelled as “reactionary”?

The voices presented are to an extent all mine. I try to express myself with the voices of others as well as with my own voice. In the end, they blend together in the curious mixture of “what the author meant to say.” This is exactly what I mean, neither more nor less — as Humpty Dumpty would put it. It is easy to construct meanings where they do not exist, and it is just as easy to misinterpret and place voices out of context. I try to avoid this by making clear when I agree and when I disagree with a voice, when I take it to be representative of other, different voices on the same subject, and when I do not. Therefore, it is my intention to present a text that is a combination and a cross-section (and an intersection as well) of my own voice with others’ voices. The sum of all this is the inclusion of *my own narrative*, my own presentation of the discourses that relate to the construction of gender in contemporary anthropology. The number of *verbatim* quotations may at times (in some chapters more than in others) appear excessive, but I believe that it is much more honest to quote what people (anthropologists, feminists, philosophers, postmodernists, authors,

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<sup>8</sup> Their voices are exemplified in a series of publications by the Belgrade Circle (for example in Colovic and Mimica 1992), as well as in magazines like *Feral Tribune* and *Arkzin* in Croatia and *Mladina* in Slovenia.

<sup>9</sup> As exemplified by Christopher Norris 1993.



etc.) actually say (in their own words), than just to paraphrase the same passages.<sup>10</sup> This (quoting instead of paraphrasing) is primarily a matter of personal choice.

It is my intent to “borrow” the voices of others in order to express myself more fully — as well as to “lend” them my own voice occasionally. In a way, I hope to create a sense of dialogue between these multiple voices and multiple perspectives. First of all, of course, people should try to speak the same (or at least a mutually comprehensible) language. I do not see that this would be more difficult in a world with plural narratives. Once we agree that we are all different, we can establish that difference as a basis for dialogue.<sup>11</sup>

I feel a great deal of ambiguity about voices that describe themselves as “humanistic.” I share this feeling of uneasiness with the authors like Foucault — although for perhaps slightly different reasons.<sup>12</sup> Some of my former mentors (and friends)<sup>13</sup> in former Yugoslavia, members of the *Praxis* philosophical group, world-

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<sup>10</sup> Some of the quotes (like the one from Milosz’s book) have been slightly modified to take into account other translations available to me (in Croatian or Serbian, etc.), and to present as much as possible the meaning of the expressions that might be lost in a literal translation. Of course, there is a possibility that (as in the case of Milosz’s book) I simply read other translations first, became familiar with them, and later tried to combine them in order to “preserve” the feeling and the understanding of the specific texts that I had before. It does not mean that the other translations are in any way “better” — they just might be more comprehensible to me personally.

<sup>11</sup> When relating the question of difference to the issues related to gender, I basically follow the approach taken by Irigaray. [This is elaborated in the chapter “Writing gender.”] In general, I found the attitudes of European (especially French) feminists very close to my own thinking and very much applicable to the issues that are being addressed here.

<sup>12</sup> I think that one can follow Foucault in saying that one cannot be “for” or “against” humanism — it all has to do with specific attitudes and specific situations. Foucault points out (1984: 44) that the concepts and the ideas of “humanism” varied a great deal over time and they were frequently in sharp opposition with each other: starting from the critique of Christianity and religion in general, through the Christian critique of ascetic and mystic movements, 19-th century humanism hostile to science, 19-th century humanism which placed all its hopes in science, Marxism, existentialism, National Socialism, Stalinism.

<sup>13</sup> So, obviously, there is also a sense of personal betrayal.

known and highly respected humanists (with all the classical and the Enlightenment connotations of that word), took the wrong turn in the horrors in former Yugoslavia. Professor Mihailo Markovic has become the chief ideologist of the Serbian ultranationalists (or National Socialists, as I prefer to call them<sup>14</sup>), and Professor Svetozar Stojanovic was for some time (1992/93) chief adviser of the then president of Serbia and Montenegro, Dobrica Cosic — a man whose writings and public discourses in the past few decades helped fuel the rising tide of Serbian nationalism. Throughout the world (and through well-established and internationally recognized philosophical journals such as *Praxis International*), these people came to be equated with the notion of humanism, with the ideals of human dignity and freedom in a rapidly changing world. But their notion of humanism turned out to be a mere illusion, it simply served to justify the acceptance of violence as a means of solving problems.

I cannot prove that this shift was a necessary or logical consequence of their “humanism,” but the fact remains that people that regarded themselves (and were regarded as such by a wide international audience!) as “humanists” took a radically different stance to the ones that regarded themselves as “postmodernists.” These and some other first-hand experiences make it very difficult for me to connect to the word “humanist,” although I realize that it may be quite unfair to people who genuinely believe in the sanctity of human life and the basic freedoms that each and every one of us should have (and that this does not invalidate the philosophical connotations of the idea of “humanism”). To them, my apologies. From them, I hope for some understanding. For this is essentially just another voice. And voices depend to a large extent on someone’s presence and ability to hear (and perhaps understand) them.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in Boskovic 1993.

<sup>15</sup> I realize that my own position might as well be described by “humanistic.” Therefore, I hope that hearing my voice can make it easier to understand what my relationship with this concept is and where it comes from.

## WORDS: MAPPING THE MEANINGS

The main purpose of this thesis is to outline the ways in which postmodernism can help us navigate the world we (me and you — readers, critics, disinterested observers, etc.) live in. By “we” I mean myself (as an author and temporary user of voices presented here) as well as my audience (readers and critical evaluators of this text), and anyone else interested in the issues discussed, mentioned or outlined here. In the simplest terms, “we” should be taken literally: it means “you and me.”

While I do not pretend that I *know* for certain how to do this navigating, I think that postmodern approaches offer some interesting insights. Furthermore, and this idea is developed in the chapter “Postmodernism, anthropology and common sense,” it seems to me that gender studies and more specifically anthropological studies of gender are an area where postmodernism and anthropology interact in a most interesting and potentially most productive way.

I begin with the longest chapter of the thesis, “Postmodernism, anthropology and common sense,” in which I outline current debates about postmodern approaches and what I see to be the source of its misunderstanding. This chapter ends with the “meeting point” of postmodernism and gender — since both are fundamentally concerned with the notion of *difference*, I try to show how they can be used together. This notion of difference is further illustrated in the chapter “The other side of the window: Gender, equality and difference in Prespa, Republic of Macedonia.” There I show how are discourses on gender in Macedonia constructed in such a way as to “justify” a certain “type” of “reality” — while at the same time both men and women are well aware that this “reality” is a mere illusion. The problems of construction and consumption of “reality” are further explored in chapter “What’s in a name?: Contemporary feminist discourses in the Republic of Slovenia,” especially in the example of an advertising poster campaign as well as with reference to some

comparative data (regarding projections of a certain type of imagery for children as well as legacy of pre-World War II feminism in the former Yugoslavia). I also use statistical data to illustrate my arguments, especially in the next chapter, "Gender, identity and rights: Mothers, fathers and the rest in Slovenia." The construction of stereotypes regarding gender differences is also illustrated using the example of the mediaeval commune of Piran. In these three chapters I provide specific examples of how the dominant narratives about gender are being questioned and in a (postmodern) sense almost deconstructed.

The concepts of difference and hyperreality are further tied together with a series of snapshots of contemporary (popular) culture when the imagery related to the body is concerned in the chapter "Writing gender: Gendered discourses and contemporary anthropology." Here I also introduce another type of community (after the ones in Macedonia and Slovenia), contemporary anthropology, with its own specific constructions (illustrated with some examples from physical anthropology). Finally, in the concluding chapter, "In the hall of mirrors: Gender, feminism, postmodernism," I tie together different receptions of feminism and postmodernism with contemporary anthropology and show how the concepts of difference and hyperreality intersect and overlap with each other, enabling researchers to construct a very useful models for understanding (or navigating) the world we live in.

In the remainder of this Introduction, I will now outline the course of the thesis in a somewhat greater detail, starting with the chapter "Postmodernism, anthropology and common sense."

One of the main problems connected with the reception of postmodernism in Anglo-American academic circles is a of lack of understanding or communication between critics and practicing "postmodernists." Although being "everybody's *bête noire*," postmodernism has at the same time played a crucial role in "shifting the paradigms in cultural studies and sociology, doing that kind of intellectual work which inevitably provokes controversy and protest, all the more so when what seem to be at

stake are precisely those terms like history, society and politics (...)” (McRobbie 1994: 1-2). The whole attitude is outlined in the dialogue between Alice and Humpty Dumpty (critics of postmodernism being represented by the latter) at the beginning of this chapter. The importance of these debates and their relevance for certain questions dealing with gender studies necessitated a relatively detailed discussion.

I make no claim that anything written here will revolutionize anthropology (I am very sceptical of most things revolutionary anyway) — I do not even think that most of what I have to say is something extraordinary or spectacular. The main points that I take from postmodernism in the context of present work are:

- 1/ the questioning of dominant narratives; and
- 2/ the notion of hyperreality.

The first is elaborated both through some examples of misunderstanding of what postmodernism represents (in the first section of the chapter “Postmodernism, anthropology and common sense”), and through specific discourses in Slovenia and Macedonia. By *discourse*, and following Umberto Eco, a semiotician and an author deeply rooted in the (South European/Mediterranean) set of cultures that I come from, I mean something that is in fundamental opposition to a *story* (in the sense of the French *histoire*, corresponding to what I call *narrative*). Unlike *story* in this sense, which contains a given subject matter, *discourse* is a way in which any given text (oral or written) exhibits to its readers or viewers the very process of its being communicated to them (cf. Eco in Blonsky 1985: 31-32). This opposition is only theoretical — it can never be achieved in practice, since there can be no story (*histoire*, or *narrative*) without discourse and there can be no discourse without story. In this sense, I understand their relationship to be similar to two sides of a coin.<sup>16</sup> The story and the discourse *at the same time* represent two aspects of essentially the same thing (by affecting one side one automatically affects the other side as well). In other words, discourse can perhaps be

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<sup>16</sup> This is the line of argumentation used by Saussure in explaining the difference between the *signifier* and the *signified*. I elaborate on this elsewhere (Boskovik N. d.)

best understood as *a style of presentation of a narrative* (hence, it can be expressed in text, sounds, images, etc.).

When referring to both ethnographic areas of my work, Macedonia and Slovenia, I use the word discourse in this sense. In both countries there is a plurality of discourses — and I have tried to cover as many as possible insofar as they relate to gender and the issues of dominant narratives and hyperreality. The recent communist past (both countries were federal units in the communist Yugoslavia from 1945 until 1991) encouraged multiple discourses as ways of expressing oneself, while at the same time encouraging some segments of population (especially university students, authors and some intellectuals) to distrust dominant (communist) narratives. At the same time, some of these narratives (like the one on the dangers of feminism) have remained extremely powerful and influential.

My use of statistical data (especially in the chapters dealing with Slovenia) is also meant to represent a certain discourse. Of course, I do not think that the statistical data can *prove* what I am trying to say — but they definitively *illustrate* my points. In all the cases, I became aware of the relevant statistics only *after* doing my field research. Again, in all the cases the statistical data provided me with the “hard” (numerical) illustrations of what I was trying to say. They always illustrate what I heard in conversations and interviews, and it was easier for me to present them than the specific conversations.<sup>17</sup> Despite my own deep distrust towards any universalizing statements,<sup>18</sup> this is one of the universalizing statements that I am willing to make.

Most of my meetings in Slovenia were with intellectuals and scholars (although I was living in Drenov Gric, a small village just outside Ljubljana), so the data from

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<sup>17</sup> In countries that have such a small population (both Slovenia and Macedonia have around two million inhabitants), being put “on the spot” by being quoted in a foreign thesis or publication is not something that people look forward to. Quoting specific individuals in pseudonyms would not help because of the *small size* of both countries — if anyone wants, any source can be quickly identified.

<sup>18</sup> After all, here I have to use *language* in order to communicate my thoughts and ideas, and *language itself is universalizing*!



general opinion polls also provided me with (averaged) opinions of much larger segments of population. Another important point is that Slovenians are extraordinarily well and very frequently studied using statistics (opinion polls, surveys, etc.) — this is a well established practice that goes back at least 20 years or so<sup>19</sup> and is very much present in the work of major Slovenian sociologists studying gender — like Professor Maca Jogan, for example. In this sense, the use of statistical data presents also *another native voice* — the voice of the scholars constructing it and using it.

I should stress, of course, that this thesis is *primarily a library thesis*. Despite the actual interviews and observations, I based most of my analysis on the published (written on contemporary anthropology/social theory/postmodernism/feminism — as well as Slovenian) materials. This emphasis on the written (published) material is not something that I set out to do from the beginning, but the wealth of data (as well as the availability of works of all the Slovenian feminist scholars, for example) directed me in that way. However, this is much less the case with Prespa, Macedonia — so, while in Slovenia I compared the data derived from the writings of (as well as my interviews with) the leading feminists and intellectuals, in Macedonia I proceeded from the reality that I observed to cross-cultural comparisons described in the literature on the rural France, Greece, and Croatia.

The construction and use of different voices is also connected with the concept of *hyperreality*. My own use is derived from the works of Baudrillard (1987, 1992, 1993) and Eco (1986). I elaborate more on this in the chapter on postmodernism, as well as in the following sections of this Introduction. Hyperreality is a reality constructed and artificial — but with the full awareness of the participants in this reality. It is a reality that *exists* while at the same time negating (or even denying) other realities, but the fact that the participants (and creators) are self-conscious of its artificiality opens numerous possibilities for paradoxes. Hyperreality is a place (or area, domain, field, etc.) where all the paradoxes meet and co-exist, side by side. The paradoxes are made obvious (apparent) through the media — and

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<sup>19</sup> I suspect that this was a way to be “subversive” while Slovenia was still ruled by the communists, since presenting numbers was much safer than presenting specific people’s specific opinions. Individuals could be harassed by the police, numbers could not.

this is something that clearly distinguishes the *hyperreal* from the end of the 20th century from the *surreal* or any similar concept. The media input enables people to see (and become aware of) themselves as others. The nature of contemporary technology (Netscape, film, TV, video) makes this imagery extremely widespread (especially in the "West"). It also makes all the paradoxes of the contemporary world more apparent. By opening the way for paradoxes, it can also lead to a greater appreciation of relativism.

The concept of relativism is essential for a variety of different methodological approaches in both philosophy and the social sciences. First of all, the realization of the arbitrariness of the basic elements of any communication system (derived from the Saussurean concept of language as a system of absolute differences), means that there can be no unique, single, and all-encompassing Truth (or Reality), or a way to approach it. We can speak only of different (essentially, arbitrary) truths or realities (in the plural, it is important to stress), and about the different ways of pursuing objective scientific inquiry. These ways are potentially limited, but they do require that we recognize the essentially arbitrary nature of all claims that pretend to aspire to universal Truth (so popular in logical positivism and related approaches), and to recognize the need for a greater deal of relativity (in Paul Feyerabend's famous term: "anything goes"<sup>20</sup>) in dealing with all such concepts. Furthermore, anthropologists as far back as Evans-Pritchard (the well-known example with the Azande witchcraft<sup>21</sup>) were frequently very well aware of *relativity* as an integral part of their research methods.

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<sup>20</sup> "To those who look at the rich material provided by history, and who are not intent on impoverishing it in order to please their lower instincts, their craving for intellectual security in the form of clarity, precision, 'objectivity', 'truth', it will become clear that there is only *one* principle that can be defended under *all* circumstances and in *all* stages of human development. It is the principle: *anything goes* ." (Feyerabend 1993: 18-19).

The pun is intentional, the variety of meanings also, so Feyerabend writes: " 'anything goes' is not a 'principle' I hold — I do not think that 'principles' can be used and fruitfully discussed outside the concrete research situation they are supposed to affect — but the terrified exclamation of a rationalist who takes a closer look at history" (1993: vii).

<sup>21</sup> Which he found as useful in dealing with his daily activities as any other method.



I think that I make clear enough (in the chapter on postmodernism) the importance of *relativism* in my own research. However, to be a relativist does not necessarily mean to be without any opinions or choices in life. I do like some things more than others, I have my favorite colors, music, teams, etc. The lived experience, as well as our place in it, is at stake here. *It is important to stress here that I find moral relativism totally unjustifiable.* It all comes to the question of personal involvement and the views that one can defend. My own background influences my belief that *we are what we do* — so it is important that we make the “right” choices in life. These choices are not something that can be played around with, nor can they be put in a morally relativistic setting. For example, I cannot see racism or any form of xenophobia as a “choice.” I cannot see any form of discrimination (based on gender, class, age, ethnic origin, etc.) as a “choice.” Being for cognitive relativism and at the same time being opposed to moral relativism might seem contradictory, but I see it as connected with *choices* in life — and it is now a well-recognized fact that people can (and do) hold contradictory (and mutually even excluding) views. I do not see any contradiction in being a relativist (where methodology and research are concerned) and at the same time arguing (in what can even be termed “value judgements”) against oppression of any kind, or, more specifically, against domestic violence. While I have certain uneasiness about concepts like “progress,” at the same time I would regard regulating domestic violence as a criminal offense (in both Macedonia and Slovenia) as a significant “step forward” and something very positive. Furthermore, I also believe that representing others (for example, African women and girls in the French colonial postcards studied by Corbey 1988) as dehumanized and animalistically sexualized objects is *wrong* (just as I believe that colonialism and ideologies such as Nazism are wrong) and I find it disgusting and disturbing. Of course, I admit that people have the right to like this type of imagery (or to glorify colonialism and fascism) — but they have no right to *impose* their values on other members of society or community. These are value judgements that I am happy to make and always willing to defend. “Anything goes” is definitively *not* a principle that I can accept when the “real life” (or lived experience) is concerned (see footnote 20).

## THE “WEST”

Words and concepts like the “West” are more difficult to define — although they have been used consistently in scholarly research (especially dealing with post-colonialist theory, but by Third-World feminists like Minh-ha [1987] as well) in the last two decades. I see the “West” as something quite different from myself and the set of cultures that I come from, while at the same time recognizing that there are differences within this concept. It is not a unified category in itself, but I find it easier to refer to certain traits as “Western.” In a geographical and political sense, the term usually<sup>22</sup> refers to most highly industrialized countries of the world, members of the EU + Norway, Iceland and Switzerland in Europe, USA, Canada, and Australia.<sup>23</sup>

Both in Macedonia and in Slovenia, the word and the concept are almost self-explanatory: “Western” equals high-tech, capitalist, market-oriented, etc. On another level, “Western” also equals dangerously different, — greedy, selfish, money as the supreme commodity, disrespect for individual freedoms. Both countries want to become part of the “West” in the first sense (democracy and market values), while avoiding the second one (greed and disrespect). To a large extent the choices have to do with material

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<sup>22</sup> In former Yugoslavia, but also some other “Third World” countries (the same understanding of the term exists in Guatemala, for example).

Citizens of Yugoslavia regarded themselves as exactly “in the middle” or in the *center* — between East (Eastern Europe, the Warsaw Pact countries) and West. A specific political background (Yugoslavia was one of the co-founders of the Non-aligned Countries Movement) contributed to this as well.

<sup>23</sup> Despite a very high level of industrialization, Japan is not seen as part of the “West.” Among the EU countries, a certain level of ambiguity exists when South European/Mediterranean countries are concerned: while France is definitively seen as “Western,” southern Italy, Greece and Portugal are considered to be closer to the “non-Western” or “Third World” cultures.

goods: the “West” comes to be equated with material wealth, and smaller nations want to take a share of it. Within the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia, with its comparatively high productivity and higher standard of living, epitomized “the West.”<sup>24</sup> This was even more the case for the visitors from former East European countries (Alenka Svab, personal communication). However, this view was not shared universally; in the late 1980s a famous Belgrade lawyer, Srdja Popovic, used the analogy of time travel to refer to his travels to the “West.” In his account, starting from “19th century Serbia,” he felt that by entering Slovenia he was in the 1920s, and only by crossing the Italian border was he crossing into the “present.”

My own position towards the West is ambivalent: I live in the West (at the moment at least), so I am part of it, but at the same time very wary of it.<sup>25</sup> For some of people in Slovenia, Macedonia and former Yugoslavia, I have become “Western,” while at the same time my ethnic background, my nationality<sup>26</sup> and my inadequate use of the English language clearly identify me as “non-Western” in the UK, for example. While, taking into account my nationality, discussing Macedonia could be seen as doing anthropology at or close to “home,” “home” for me, in the last three years, has been St. Andrews. Of course, there is a sense of closeness, a sense in which I almost instinctively “understand” (not necessarily approve!) some things and attitudes expressed in both Slovenia and Macedonia — but I do not know how to refer to or how to express this feeling of “closeness” here.

At the risk of “orientalizing” the concept, I take the “West” to be a product (and a stereotype!) of relatively recent history (since the 16th century CE), and in the second section

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<sup>24</sup> Most of the citizens of former Yugoslavia understood their country to border the West exactly where Slovenia borders Italy and Austria — *not* where Macedonia borders Greece (cf. note 22)!

<sup>25</sup> I prefer to refer to myself as a “Third World” person — with all the political implications of this concept. But this is only a very vague determinant, since I am well aware that just like within the “West,” there are huge differences within the “Third World.”

<sup>26</sup> Although I use the terms “ethnicity” and “nationality” interchangeably in my chapter on Macedonia, I have to note that while they are related, *ethnicity does not necessarily correspond to nationality*. I see “nationality” as primarily having a certain passport; I can have (in theory) a French passport — but that would not make ethnically French.

of the chapter "Postmodernism, anthropology and common sense"<sup>27</sup> I elaborate on this, following Stephen Toulmin (1990). I see the Western powers (political and economic) as well as Western discourses as something in positions of absolute power and domination, acquired with the great colonial expansion of the nations of the Northwestern edge of the European peninsula (cf. Bauman 1993: 135-136) in the last three centuries.

## "DIFFERENCE" AND "HETEROGENEITY"

The dominant (post-Renaissance) Western intellectual tradition is, as I see it, intrinsically opposed to difference and heterogeneity — and these are the traits that characterize postmodern approaches. Furthermore, the whole idea of domination leads to the justification of "objectifying" approaches that relegate *others* (other ethnic groups, women, children, etc.) to lower levels of "humanity." Therefore, feminist scholars were quick to point out that "[k]nowledge is not objectively arrived at but subjectively and practically gained" (Sandra Farganis quoted in Dagenais 1987: 23). Furthermore, according to Angela Miles, the claim to "objective knowledge" is "possible (enforceable) only for the powerful groups in the society which can to a certain extent shape the society by their very definitions. The claim is also a key component in maintaining their power" (1985: 9). This "demystification" of "objectivity" is certainly an area in which postmodernisms and feminisms find themselves — both sets of approaches insist on pluralism and heterogeneity, both elevate the notion of difference(s) high enough, as something to be reckoned with.

It is hardly surprising then to find that the criticism of postmodern approaches focuses to a great extent on these notions of difference and heterogeneity — this is explored in the section "Anthropology and common sense: The way we were."

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<sup>27</sup> In the section "What do you think you know (and why?)?: Two great Western traditions."

Questions of heterogeneity and otherness (as well as some gender-related issues) are further explored in the section "Postmodernism and anthropology: 'It's the end of the world as we know it'." Some of the questions mentioned (like the ones related to otherness, money and power, etc.) are presented in a very condensed form. Women are already recognized as others in recent general anthropological texts (for example, Kilani 1994) — as well as in writings of the most important postmodern scholars like Lyotard (1989) and Baudrillard (1996). Obviously, there is a risk of oversimplifying the otherwise complex issues, but again I see issues related to identity, otherness, power and gender as essentially stemming from a certain type of narrative (established as a result of the "rationalistic turn" in the last three centuries) — it is these specific narratives that need to be questioned, and postmodernism provides adequate tools for this. (I have to add that *questioning* something does not necessarily imply that something is wrong — but by *questioning* it we can go further and understand it better.)

## "CULTURE"

Another term that I use a lot in this text is "culture." It is also a universalizing and totalizing concept, but one which cannot be avoided. Entire volumes have been written about it by learned people of the past, and I neither can nor wish to compete with them.<sup>28</sup> Following Umberto Eco, I propose to look at culture as something intrinsically heterogeneous. In one sense, culture is something completely opposed to practical everyday activities, as well as areas like politics, economics or science. Culture, understood in this way:

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<sup>28</sup> Of course, as noted by Moore (1988: 197): "There is no generally accepted definition in social anthropology of what a culture is."

privileges the formation of aesthetic taste, according to the dominant class of course (Beethoven is culture, while appreciating the singing of drunks is not, unless in the form of ethnological study, nostalgia, or the snob research of kitsch) (...) It is not possible for everyone, for reasons of class, income and innate ability. It is a sign of distinction.

(Eco 1994: 117-118)

This is what keeps sections on “culture” in newspapers and magazines separate from the ones devoted to the issues related to politics, society or production.

In another sense, “culture” can be defined as a superior attitude of mind set against the ignorance of the masses. In this sense, it does not necessarily privilege areas such as “humanities,” thus:

a bank manager and a customs officer are equally men of culture (...) In the final analysis, culture is the possession of knowledge in every sense (...) In its democratic aspects this gives rise to appeals for the diffusion of culture among the lower classes. But precisely because practical and manual knowledge are excluded from it. A car mechanic is not a cultured man (...) Therefore this idea of culture also entails a measure of idleness as a necessary condition for cultural growth.

(Eco 1994: 118)

Finally, in what Eco calls an “anthropological definition,” culture comprises “institutions, myths, rites, laws, beliefs, codified everyday behaviour, value systems and material techniques elaborated by a group of humans.” In this sense, culture does not have to be explicit, nor does it invite value judgements. On the other hand, “cultures whose experience of other, different cultures has not been traumatic do not identify themselves as a culture, but as the model of humanity pure and simple” (Eco 1994: 120). It is precisely this last sense in which a certain set of cultures have established themselves as dominant over other cultures, and it is precisely this aspect which is questioned by postmodern anthropologists.

Quotes and epigraphs are an integral part of my line of argumentation. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* (1992a, 1992b) provided me with several important examples — like the one



when Alice actually steps through the mirror (or looking glass<sup>29</sup>). A mirror analogy provides me with a convenient way to explore the notions related to the concept of difference(s), and it is precisely this concept that is shared by both contemporary feminism and postmodern approaches (Svab 1995: 3-4). On the one side is the importance of the whole set of othernesses for anthropology. On the *other*, women as others are recognized as a set of legitimate categories to be studied (for example, Strathern 1987a: 288), as well as deconstruction of the “unified female subject” in contemporary gender-related research (for example, Butler 1990, 1993, 1995; Moore 1994b). The last two sections of the chapter on postmodernism (“Postmodernism and common sense: Beyond the looking glass” and “Conclusions and points of departure: Defining gender”) serve to introduce this theme into the main body of the thesis. It would be very naïve to claim that by just stepping through the looking glass (as brave Alice does) one can overcome all the complexities and resolve all the questions by simply leaving them behind. *Stepping through* I understand as the first step towards exploring the concept of difference and its relevance for both contemporary anthropology and gender-related studies.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS

A questioning of dominant narratives and an exposition of hyperreality are my primary concerns in the chapters dealing with Macedonia and Slovenia. My research on Slovenia was mostly based on the publications of leading Slovenian scholars. In this sense, from a “Western” point of view, this can be seen as an instance of “elitist” discourses — but the Slovenian scholars certainly do not see it that way (Vesna Godina, personal communication). I had access to everything that was published on gender-related research in Slovenia. On the one hand, feminist discourses provided me with a relatively coherent *area* or *community* for research. On the other, they do have certain impact in a rapidly changing

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<sup>29</sup> Of course, this also provided an inspiration for the title of Michael Herzfeld’s book (1987).

world of a newly independent country. Finally, their impact is also muted and moderated, both by the inherited (communist) past, and by the prejudices that people still have and the issues regarding the distribution of power. Most importantly, the emphasis on Slovenian feminist discourses takes them (Slovenian feminists) as agents of (possible) change, so I was interested to see what their influence really is and how far can they push the limits of what the more conservative elements in the society see as "normal" or "natural."

The amount of material that I gathered in Slovenia much outweighs that in Macedonia — I was able to meet almost all of the Slovenian feminist scholars and authors.<sup>30</sup> This was impossible in Macedonia (in fact, I did not get any reply to my inquiries from any of the women's groups there) — partly due to the fact that the word "feminism" has a certain inherited (negative) meaning from the recent communist past. "Feminist literature" is viewed with considerable suspicion in the Government's official report for the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing (Government of the Republic of Macedonia 1995: 27) — although it is difficult to find examples of it in Macedonian.

On the other hand, I obviously (having spent there perhaps one quarter of my life so far) *know* (in a very subjective and relativistic way!) much more about the way(s) in which society functions in Macedonia — hence the level of generalizations in the chapter "The other side of the window: Gender, equality and difference in Prespa, Republic of Macedonia." I am aware that my statements may appear universalizing, but they come as a product of actual observation and interviews (I am not sure how can I precisely refer to "living" in the one's area of study), and they must be taken in the context of a particular individual interacting with other particular individuals in order to produce something (a written work for the purpose of obtaining a degree in anthropology) that has no point of reference in the

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<sup>30</sup> I did not set out with the intention of meeting all of the Slovenian feminist scholars and authors, but in the course of my research they somehow established themselves as a relatively homogenous group (homogenized for me under the "Slovenia/feminism" heading). As a group, they share a type of discourse that is not necessarily understood by the wider population. At the same time, some of them (Jogan, Renner) rely on the statistical data and observations of the segments of population for their own research.



local (Macedonian) culture. By this I mean that there is no such thing as *anthropology* in Macedonia — there is no course of studies at any of the country's universities, people<sup>31</sup> do not know what it is that “an anthropologist” may be. There is no such thing as “gender studies” either — despite the fact that it was a Macedonian, Professor Dimitar Mircev, who taught several courses on gender at the Faculty of the Social Sciences in Ljubljana in the early 1980s, and with the important exception of the PhD dissertation by Mileva Gjurovska (1995).<sup>32</sup> I found it extremely difficult to explain to “ordinary people” in Prespa what was I doing — and in the end I simply gave up. The only level on which my explanations made sense was the one of *ethnography*, hence the (descriptive and general) style of the chapter also reflects what people in Macedonia in general and in Prespa in particular would recognize as a description of their own “reality.”

Of course, this “reality” is a construction — as several examples concerned with gender clearly show. While women are supposed (in everyday discourses) to be oppressed and subordinated, they are not necessarily so. By “everyday discourses” I mean what “ordinary people” (“average” persons in “average” situation at any time or place<sup>33</sup>) say in everyday conversations. Obviously, everyone has a set of beliefs about what things are and how they should be. I found quite interesting the fact that while both men and women participate in an (officially approved or sanctioned) discourse that acknowledges women's subordination, both men and women are at the same time aware that this is not necessarily true!<sup>34</sup> One can talk about complementarity much more than about subordination or domination — and historical studies (such as the one of the peasant families in France) provide further examples that illustrate this concept.

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<sup>31</sup> Ordinary people in Prespa, of course. Intellectuals like Professor Dimitar Mircev are obviously very aware of the concept.

<sup>32</sup> The “official” area for which this PhD dissertation is produced is sociology of work.

<sup>33</sup> At the same time, I do not claim that this specific person as such exists — I construct my idealized categories following Max Weber's (1989) concept of “ideal types.”

<sup>34</sup> This is hyperreality at its best.

It is impossible not to mention specific historical circumstances (the fall of communism and the actual emergence of both countries as sovereign and independent as one of its results) common to both Macedonia and Slovenia. In the case of Macedonia, the "ethnic mix" is quite diverse (65% Macedonians, 23% Albanians, among the rest Turks, Vlachs, Romas, Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, Armenians...). For some quite extraordinary political reasons (some of which look as if they have been taken from Ionesco's "theater of the absurd"), Macedonia is, however, faced with very specific problems: their neighbors claim that it doesn't exist (cf. Schwartz 1995, Danforth 1993). Albania claims that the western part of the country (where the majority of ethnic Albanians live) should be given huge autonomy and probably eventually should be annexed to Albania itself. Serbia and Macedonia have some unresolved territorial disputes, and the majority of Serbs believe that Macedonians are just "Southern Serbs" (a term used during the Serbian occupation, between 1912 and 1941). Bulgaria claims that, while Macedonia as a country exists, Slav Macedonians do not, and that they are, basically, just Bulgarians who have not yet realized their "true" (that is to say, Bulgarian) identity. Finally, Greece believes that Macedonia's close relations with Turkey<sup>35</sup> pose a threat to Greece. This attitude is connected with the Greek denial of the existence of a Slav Macedonian minority<sup>36</sup> in its northern province and the refusal to grant to this minority such basic rights as the use of its own (Macedonian) language.<sup>37</sup>

The Macedonian language is recognized as a distinctive South Slavic language by all the countries in the world *with the exception of its neighbors Greece and Bulgaria*. Because

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<sup>35</sup> Bulgaria and Turkey were the first two countries to recognize Macedonia under her constitutional name.

<sup>36</sup> Helsinki Watch and other NGOs put the number of Slav Macedonians in this area between 15,000 and 50,000.

<sup>37</sup> These issues are very much present in contemporary anthropology. A great controversy arose recently when Cambridge University Press (at a very late stage and bypassing its own anthropology editorial board) refused to publish a book by Greek anthropologist Anastasia Karakasidou, dealing with the Slav Macedonian minority in northern Greece. Apparently, the publisher was afraid that this book might irate Greeks.

of Greek pressure (the northern Greek province is also called Macedonia), Macedonia was, in April 1993, admitted to the UN (and afterwards to other world organizations) only under a temporary (it is still in use now, in August 1996!) name: *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*. It is still being referred to by this temporary name in official communications from the EU, US, and other world organizations — but this term (and being referred to by it) almost all Macedonians find very offensive.

So, Macedonia is a new country that perhaps exists and it is inhabited by people claimed and at the same time denied by their neighbors. This whole situation creates a sense of disbelief. Even on the personal level, I cannot really explain how it feels to be informed of one's own non-existence (I met one Greek person in St. Andrews who really could not believe that I existed). Macedonia not only provides some interesting examples for the concept of hyperreality — *it is hyperreal itself!*

The same can be said of Slovenia, for it was throughout its history:

a country so thoroughly suspended between East and West, for so many centuries, that it actually disappeared. Or, to be more precise, it didn't appear at all — until the spring of 1991, that is. Slovenia's limbo within this East-West "twilight zone" — most recently, between the great Orwellian blocks of the century's second half — did nothing to lessen the struggles fought on her soil. (Hemingway's First World War novel *A Farewell to Arms*, which chronicles the carnage of the Socha Front, never once mentions Slovenia — despite being set almost entirely within the borders of the present-day republic.) Slovenia's obscurity on the global stage, the concomitant inconsequentiality of her fate, have made the Slovenes unconsciously attuned to historical and ideological pressure changes.

(Mocnik 1994: 83)

In the chapter "The other side of the window: Gender, equality and difference in Prespa, Republic of Macedonia" I also mention the special role that families have in shaping the lives of individuals.<sup>38</sup> Marriage is essentially a contract between families — and it is the

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<sup>38</sup> Attitudes towards families (including some comparative data) are further explored in the Slovenian context in the chapter "Gender, identity and rights."

way for families to reassert their position within the local community. Some terms, like “neolocality,” should be understood in this specific context. Couples in Prespa (and in Macedonia in general, as well as in Slovenia) are not as mobile as their counterparts in some industrialized Western countries (US, United Kingdom, etc.). Throughout the South European/Mediterranean cultures, the concept of “neolocal residence” implies several important things. First of all, it is easier to build a house closer to where one lives. If the land is expensive or difficult to get, the easy way out is to build it on land owned by the groom’s or bride’s parents. This new house might even be adjacent or the extension of the one owned by the parents, but this is still a new residence — *a new locality* (Baskar 1993: 150).

A very important point that I wish to make is the role of women as “keepers of the family” — the ones that preserve the local cultural heritage by telling stories to and raising the children. The role of women as nurturers is therefore elevated to the level of the ones responsible for the survival of the whole nation. This way of representing women as in a sense “mothers” of the whole nation is fairly typical in Balkan cultures and it has a long history, from the Serbian medieval myth of the battle of Kosovo in 1389,<sup>39</sup> to the more recent carnage in the former Yugoslavia (Ivekovic 1996). Nationalists stressed this as the primary and “natural” role for women, and took it as an excuse to try to limit their rights (regarding both work and reproductive rights).

Some of the questions relating to nationalism and identity are explored further in the chapter “Gender, identity and rights: Mothers, fathers and the rest in Slovenia.” The debates around the proposed changes of the Slovenian Maternity Leave Law<sup>40</sup> highlighted some arguments that have been put forward by the nationalists and right-wing parties; in essence, they claim that women have both a duty and an obligation to stay at home and care for children. These efforts, however, did not achieve the desired

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<sup>39</sup> An excellent reading of this myth with regard to the role of women is in Slapsak 1995.

<sup>40</sup> See the Appendix. One has to note that the whole area of maternity leave is comparatively well regulated in Slovenia (Office for Women’s Policy 1996: 1).

effects — they galvanized women across the spectrum of class, education and income, and the proposed changes were defeated.

The important points where Slovenia is concerned relate to both the heterogeneity and the marginality of gender-related discourses (this is discussed in some detail in the chapter “What’s in a name?: Contemporary feminist discourses in the Republic of Slovenia”).<sup>41</sup> The very beginnings of anthropology in Slovenia are connected with gender-related issues; the study of prostitutes was one of the first major projects (in the 1930s) of the University of Ljubljana’s Department of Anthropology, led by Dr. Bozo Skerlj. This included measuring the diameter of their heads, weighing them, registering the color of their eyes, etc. (Zavirsek 1994: 119). Of course, this specific project served only to corroborate the prevailing cultural and social opinions (that prostitutes are not very intelligent, that they age prematurely and die young, etc.) — even though none of these were supported by actual census data. However, these “scientifically supported” (or “objective”) claims both contributed to and influenced the normative discourses of what the “true” role of a woman should be. These claims were also based on the dichotomy public/private, but this dichotomy is not always present and does not have the same meanings like as the West (for examples from East Central Europe, see Einhorn 1993).

This is another example of the conflation of the “real” and the “ideal”: the former relating to how things are (or how they appear to us), the latter to how (someone says or we think) things should be. The concept of “lived reality” would fall within the first meaning; the normative discourses of how one should act or what one should do in a specific situation, within the second one. I do not claim that any of these concepts (like “real,” “ideal,” public,” “private,” etc.) is “objective” — all that relevantly exists in Slovenia (as well as in Macedonia) is that which is conceptualized by the people I talked with (my “informants”).

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<sup>41</sup> An abridged version of this chapter was presented at the one-day feminist conference in St. Andrews (Boskovik 1996).

This conceptualizing aspect must be taken into account where my own presentation of the Macedonian and Slovenian situation is concerned. I am not trying to present a universalizing and totalizing account of what gender differences are and how are they constructed in these regions — I am just offering a narrative. The fact that I am the first non-Slovenian to conduct this kind of research in Slovenia, while Prespa in Macedonia has never been studied anthropologically increases the risks, but I hope to minimize them by giving credit to differing (whenever possible) voices and opinions and by relativizing my own interpretation (this is again where the quote from Milosz comes in very handy). In the course of my work, several people from Slovenia and Macedonia were able to read these chapters and I was very pleased by the fact that they found them reasonable as an account of their “realities” (with some critical remarks, of course).

## FROM ANTHROPOLOGY TO FEMINISM AND BACK: POINTS OF REFERENCE

The chapter “Writing gender: Gendered discourses and contemporary anthropology” presents both a radical break with the previous three chapters (in style as well as in content) and at the same time explores the same themes of gender difference(s) and construction. Here is where I (having briefly done so in the chapter “Postmodernism, anthropology and common sense”) turn again to anthropology, but anthropology in the widest possible sense, anthropology as “a study of culture” — *culture* in all the three senses outlined above. Contemporary anthropology has been influenced by feminist theorists from France (Luce Irigaray in particular) and (as far as it is concerned with gender studies) it is increasingly realizing the importance of the concept of the (sexed, eroticized) body. “Contemporary anthropology” is taken here to represent another type of community — not on the lines of geographical, ethnic or national criteria (as in the cases of Macedonia and Slovenia), but



more as a professional endeavour and a type of community which people enter by choice (and through a system of the elaborate initiation ceremonies connected with education, research, writing and examinations).<sup>42</sup>

The chapter begins with an outline of the writings on difference of one of the major feminist authors of our time, Luce Irigaray. Equality and difference were major themes discussed in the previous three chapters, so Irigaray presents some kind of a logical continuation of this theme. At the same time, she is an important representative of a set of theories (Lacanian and post-Lacanian, psychoanalysis-influenced) which is extremely influential in Slovenia (Žižek 1990, 1992, 1994; Renata Salecl, Eva Bahovec and the whole circle around the journal *Delta*), and she herself has been studied by some of the leading Slovenian feminist scholars (Zupanc Ećimović 1995).

The second section of this chapter ("I sing the body electric: Bodies, sexes, anthropologists, metaphors") presents an overview (too sketchy, perhaps) of various discourses concerned with the body — from popular culture to women's studies and anthropology. This is again a theme that has been studied by leading feminist scholars in Slovenia (Bahovec 1995) — and its importance is further stressed when one refers to the advertising campaign ("VSAKA IMA SVOJ FAKTOR") discussed in the chapter "What's in a name? Contemporary feminist discourses in the Republic of Slovenia." This whole campaign can be seen in light of the Western semiotics of advertising — and this cannot be separated from contemporary (Western) views and opinions related to sexed and eroticized bodies. I try to illustrate these views by offering several snapshots of contemporary discourses and representations — from *Playboy* to the *National Geographic*, French colonial postcards, and contemporary fashion critics. This section also represents a connection with some of my articles on the representation of eroticized body in comic books (Bosković 1990a, 1990b) — which was the first time that I thought about gendered representations. The body as a construct gains in relevance in contemporary feminist debates

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<sup>42</sup> Communities like Slovenia and Macedonia are never entered by a choice — one has to be born into them. (Non-Slovenians and non-Macedonians can, of course, obtain Slovenian or Macedonian nationality, but they will never, under any circumstances, be recognized as one of "us.")



on gender and difference, as will become obvious in the concluding chapter ("In the hall of mirrors: Gender, anthropology, postmodernism").

Finally, in the section " 'Females readily available': Apes, monkeys and humans," I mention some of the most important female anthropologists and the impact that they had on the understanding of new constructs related to gender. It is a fact that physical or biological anthropology has been one area where the impact of female researchers in the last 20 years has been truly remarkable. It seems that at one point, this area was regarded as marginal enough for women to be granted "equal access" (some of the prejudices as well as further references are given in Haraway 1991). However, scholars like Tanner, Zihlman and Haraway (as well as primatologists Goodall, Fossey, Galdikas and Strum before them) did more than that: they started questioning the dominant narratives of human evolution, behavioral patterns, and so on, and changed and at the same time increased our understanding of these narratives.

In the final chapter, "In the hall of mirrors: Gender, anthropology, postmodernism," I discuss some specific accounts of feminism and postmodernism as they relate to anthropology. Anthropologists like Strathern, Moore and Haraway, as well as scholars from other disciplines like Butler, and De Lauretis, represent the trend that moves contemporary research towards a greater inclusion and a greater importance of difference (the title of Henrietta Moore's last book: *A Passion for Difference*). However, the implications of this concept are not acceptable to such feminists as Lovibond, Felski, Probyn, and Chapman, who take as their starting point the universal category of "woman."

The construction of gender is also put into perspective with examples that Archetti (1994) provides of models of masculinity in the Argentinian tango. When discussing the place of men in feminism, I mention Jean Baudrillard and his theory of seduction as a way of overcoming tensions and conflicts between the genders. Baudrillard (1996) also thinks that the concept of Otherness which men and women project to each others is a legacy of Modernity. Therefore, he presents a good example of postmodern theorists trying to abolish the artificial dichotomies and Enlightenment-derived concepts. I also mention a critique of

models derived from the study of education (who performs better, who performs worse, and under which circumstances). Some of the differences assumed in learning seem to be a direct result of methodological errors. Educational discourses also represent an important point of reference for some Slovenian scholars — as can be seen in the section “Understanding constructs...” of the chapter “What’s in a name?...”

The concept of difference(s), which had previously been regarded as between men and women in contemporary studies of gender, gains new relevance. At the same time it becomes a tool for studying differences between (and, as De Lauretis would argue, *within*) women (as well as men) themselves.

Contemporary feminist scholars look at these differing expressions of difference from both within and outside the feminist movement. Feminist theories and politics are increasingly being called into question. This particularly goes for categories such as women, gender, sexual difference, identity, and the body.

This is the area where postmodernism and feminism become closely connected. According to Seyla Benhabib (1995), neither feminism nor postmodernism are merely descriptive categories, but constitutive and evaluative concepts which help to define the practices which they both try to describe. According to Carol Bigwood (1991), it is the body that presents the ultimate challenge for both feminism and postmodernism. She maintains that what we need is a new model of the nature/culture dichotomy, which would include the dimension of gender without taking the body itself as a product of cultural meaning.

I also focus on Judith Butler’s book *Gender Trouble*, which represents a turning point in a recognition of the difficulties in contemporary feminism, as well as the usefulness of approaches that can be described as postmodern. Butler argues that, essentially, even biological sex is culturally constructed. Western industrialized societies are based on a specific “contract” between the genders, and this “contract” clearly assigns and differentiates. But gender “realities” are never as simple or straightforward as they may appear to be. As Butler says:

It may well be a woman, male-identified, who desires another woman, or a man, female-identified, who desires another man, and it may also be a woman, male-identified, who desires a man, female-identified, or, similarly, a man, female-identified, who desires a woman, male-identified.

(quoted in Angerer 1994: 198)

One of Butler's main points is the deconstruction of the idea of a "naturalized" heterosexual identity. The body is represented merely as an instrument or a medium and this is burdened with cultural meanings. Even notions such as the "womb" are a mere construction. Sexual identity is a shifting, changeable phenomenon, not a static, fixed thing. Butler argues that the separation of sex from gender is irrelevant. "To *become* a gender" is how she describes a process of "naturalization."

This whole area opens numerous possibilities for dialogue and collaboration between gender studies and anthropology. Of course, anthropologists like Marilyn Strathern (for example, 1991) have already noted that in some aspects (like the "deconstruction of the unified male subject" — not the exact term used by Strathern!) feminism actually precedes postmodernism. The work of an anthropologist like Henrietta Moore (1988, 1994*b*) is an example of interaction between gender studies and postmodernism, and I also explore the consequences of this interaction.<sup>43</sup>

This whole area also resembles a hall of mirrors: the images that we see are both others and ourselves (as well as ourselves and others and vice versa), sometimes distorted, sometimes funny, sometimes blurred. Mirrors are at the same time *the only ways in which we can see ourselves* — so we can never know whether the image that we saw was "real" or even "true." I guess that we shall always need others to tell us that.

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<sup>43</sup> It is interesting to note that Moore 1988 provides an important point of reference for Slovenian feminist scholars — like Darja Zavirsek (1995), for example.

# Postmodernism, anthropology, and common sense

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master — that’s all.”

(Carroll 1992*b* : 159)

## INTRODUCTION: FROM ANTHROPOLOGY TO THE POSTMODERN WORLD AND BACK

“What is your argument worth, what is your proof worth?” (...)

“What is your ‘what is it worth’ worth?”

(Lyotard 1984: 54 *passim*)

We live in the postmodern world. Whether one regards this statement as obviously true or just as obviously false probably defines one’s attitudes towards the word and the concept. In this chapter, I intend to outline the debates surrounding “postmodern” approaches in anthropology, different theoretical assumptions, as well as the area(s) where these approaches can inform anthropological research. I will begin with an overview of the working definitions of “postmodernism” and the attitudes towards it that characterize current anthropological theory, continuing with what I regard to be the most illustrative examples of it being misunderstood and misrepresented, and concluding with the meeting point of postmodern anthropology and the study of gender. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I intend to briefly outline some of the problems that arise in the definition of the word and concept “gender,” as well as its distinction from other related concepts — like “sex,” for example.

Postmodernism implies something that comes after (*post*) Modernism, so another implication is that we all (reading this, participating in debates, or just watching from the sidelines) share the same (or at least similar) knowledge of the same (or at least commensurable) concepts within our common (shared) intellectual and cultural framework. It also implies that we can agree on the

meaning of concepts such as Modernism.<sup>44</sup> (One attempt at outlining a definition which I find useful in the context of present work has been made by Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, originally published in 1979.<sup>45</sup>) But this is not the case.<sup>46</sup> In this chapter, I will attempt to briefly point out some of the difficulties that arise from the simple fact that the language<sup>47</sup> that we (anthropologists, philosophers, social scientists, critical intellectuals, etc.) use does not denote the same things (or concepts) for the same people.<sup>48</sup>

Still, the same concept of postmodernism is usually associated with the names of Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, Gianni

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Williams 1989: 31-35; Toulmin 1990: 7-13; Docherty 1993a: 1-3; Huyssen 1990: 235 ff; Hassan 1993: 149; for a completely different perspective, see Eco 1986: 61-72.

<sup>45</sup> To quote from Lyotard (1984: xxiii): "I will use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind [producing a discourse of legitimation with respect to its own status] making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth."

On the other hand, Foucault proposed looking at modernity "rather as an attitude than as a period of history (...) a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people (...) a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task" (1984: 39, *passim*).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Mongardini 1992; Hassan 1986; Featherstone et al. 1988; Llobera 1988; Lovibond 1989; Hall and Jarvie 1992; Smart 1992; Lyon 1994; De Lauretis 1987: 73-75.

<sup>47</sup> And within language, different concepts or signs and symbols. I will use the term "sign" to refer to anything that denotes anything within the realm of communication. I will use the term "symbol" to refer to something that invokes the image or a concept of something that is not immediately present. For the further elaboration and more precise references, see the appropriate chapters in Nöth 1990.

<sup>48</sup> I agree with Zygmunt Bauman (in Featherstone et. al. 1988) that the concept of postmodernism is inherently connected with the intellectuals' search for meaning in a rapidly changing world, as well as with his comments regarding the impossibility of defining Modernism retroactively, now that we do have postmodernism as a (more or less — depends on who is talking) radical break or rupture with the concepts that were prevalent in a Western (European in the first place) cultural tradition since the early 17th century.



Vattimo and Slavoj Žižek in philosophy, Michel Foucault and Hayden White in history, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, R. D. Laing, Norman O. Brown in psychoanalysis, Herbert Marcuse, Jean Baudrillard and Jürgen Habermas in political philosophy, Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend in the philosophy of science, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Wolfgang Iser and the “Yale critics” in literary theory, Merce Cunningham, Alwin Nikolais, Meredith Monk in dance, John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Laurie Anderson in music, Robert Rauschenberg, Jean Tinguely in art, Robert Venturi, Charles Jencks, Charles Moore in architecture, as well as various authors like Samuel Beckett, Hélène Cixous, Eugène Ionesco, Jorge Luis Borges, Harold Pinter, Peter Handke, Thomas Bernhard, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Italo Calvino, Danilo Kiš, William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, and Sam Shepard.<sup>49</sup> (Movies like *The Blade Runner*, *Alien*, and *Blue Velvet* also come to mind.) As Hassan (1993: 147) remarks, “these names are far too heterogeneous to form a movement, paradigm, or school. Still, they may evoke a number of related cultural tendencies, a constellation of values, a repertoire of procedures and attitudes. These we call *postmodernism*.”

The very concept of postmodernism implies the sense of *narrativity* in which we all live; we are both producers, as well as users and consumers of different types of narratives.<sup>50</sup> Narratives tend to be imposed and superimposed,

<sup>49</sup> This list of names is based on Hassan 1993: 147, with some slight modifications. It is by no means exhaustive or final, and it does not imply that the authors listed would necessarily consider themselves as postmodern.

<sup>50</sup> This sense of narrativity primarily means that we are constantly both involved and exposed to different narratives (whether through the media, some other kind of state/political/ideological propaganda, or in our everyday lives). We are caught in the net of narratives which in some ways resembles a spider’s web — except that there is no escape (not even theoretically) from the net of narratives. We are almost dependent on them. They are here to stay — as dominant discourses in politics, sciences, cultures, even in supposedly “democratic” information environments like the Internet. Only by being aware of this fact, we can successfully try to cope with this situation and *question the basis and the content of all narratives*. For the different concepts of the study of



and they tend to articulate the way in which we perceive the world, so it is very important to realize how and why they are produced, and to what end. These questions lead to increasing disbelief and a sense of doubt in regard to the narratives that are trying to impose themselves as metanarratives of the present world. These narratives are referred to by different types of knowledge and often various types of communication (which seem to be the most important aspects of Lyotard's book, which opened up a way for the theories of the postmodern in Anglo-American academia). As a matter of fact, Lyotard (1984: xxiv) defines "*postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives."<sup>51</sup>

It is not my intention to cover here all the different currents that regard themselves (or are regarded as such by their proponents or critics) as postmodern, but to concentrate on the areas in which most successful interaction between anthropology and postmodernism takes place. These areas are sometimes associated with the so-called "literary turn," or the meeting point of anthropology, literature, literary criticism, hermeneutics, and anti-foundationalist philosophy, but also with the increasing importance of gender studies and the influence of feminist theory. This vast area has been plagued by a lack of proper communication, since sometimes it seems that everyone is trying to say the same thing at the same time, while also contradicting everyone else.<sup>52</sup> This lack of

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narrative, I refer to Paul Ricœur (cf. Wood 1991). An excellent encyclopedic overview is given by Nöth 1990: 367-373.

My own use of the word *narrative* implies first and foremost a story presented using a certain type of discourse. By the *metanarrative* (following Lyotard), I mean a story that establishes itself as the dominant story of the epoch and within a certain cultural frame (society, set of cultures, dominant ideology, etc.).

<sup>51</sup> "These metanarratives are stories which purport to justify loyalty to, or breaks with, certain contemporary communities, but which are neither historical narratives about what these or other communities have done in the past nor scenarios about what they might do in the future" (Rorty 1983: 585).

<sup>52</sup> For example, criticism of postmodernism in anthropology from the feminist perspective Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen 1989; also Benhabib 1995; but slightly different approach from the feminist

proper communication becomes critical in the case of postmodernism. I will try to show that proper communication is the key to an understanding of the debates and issues stemming from what I regard to be an argument that has persisted in the Western (European) intellectual tradition since at least the Renaissance.

In contemporary anthropology, the word and the concept postmodernism is quite frequently used in a derogatory sense (King 1991; Pool 1991; Coombe 1991; Gordon 1993; Knauff 1994, etc.), to refer to writings of anthropologists that are regarded as the representatives of the "Postmodern" or "literary" turn (the terms are used synonymously in Fabian 1991), mostly George Marcus, James Clifford, Michael Fischer, Michael Taussig, Vincent Crapanzano, Kevin Dwyer, Marilyn Strathern, Johannes Fabian, Bob Scholte, and Stephen Tyler.<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note that most of these authors do not regard themselves as "Postmodern,"<sup>54</sup> some even specifically state so (cf. the examples cited in Pool 1991; Scholte 1986 and 1987), but this is insufficient for the critics of anything "Postmodern." For the critics, the word comes to mean almost anyone that does not know what she/he is talking about, which then necessitates recourse to strange styles and different modes of expression. By extension, it also means that the practicing "Postmodernists" are completely detached from the problems and concerns of the contemporary world.<sup>55</sup> This kind of criticism has also been

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perspective as well is by Fraser and Nicholson in Featherstone et al. 1988: 373-394; as well as by Butler 1995. The work of Henrietta Moore (1994b) establishes a frame in which postmodernism and anthropology can successfully coexist, as I will show in the last chapter.

<sup>53</sup> Other names, like Clifford Geertz, or Paul Rabinow, are occasionally added to this list. I do not wish to imply that this list of names is exhaustive in any sense; my primary concern is with the authors with whose work(s) I am familiar with.

<sup>54</sup> To be more specific, only Stephen Tyler does, although his response to Scholte puts a bit of uncertainty as to whether he regards Clifford and Marcus as part of this group or not.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Scholte 1986 for the critique of Geertz; and Scholte 1987; Fardon 1990 and Hobart 1990 for the general assessment of the volume *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

directed at the “deconstructionist” movement in contemporary critical theory, primarily associated with the influence of Jacques Derrida (1974, 1978, 1982a, 1982b),<sup>56</sup> postmodernism as presented to the English-speaking world by Jean-

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The reply of one of the participants in the *Writing Culture* volume (and the only one who does regard himself to be a postmodern!) to Scholte is worth quoting, because it summarizes some of the frequent misunderstandings of what postmodernism does or could signify for anthropology:

*Writing Culture* is not post-modern; its authors neither invert the relationship between aesthetics and epistemology nor revolutionize the three-fold hierarchy of epistemology, politics, and aesthetics (in descending order of *hierarchic* precedence)... they are willing only to promote politics, to contextualize science to power, to relativize epistemology to politics, but this politicization of discourse does not change or threaten the ancient Western idea of hierarchized discourses. Instead, it preserves the myth of a privileged discourse that founds or grounds all the others  
(Tyler 1987: 51).

<sup>56</sup> For a valid and very useful assessment of the “deconstructionist” movement, see Norris 1991 — although Norris himself does criticize the postmodern movement — and Baudrillard in particular — from a radical leftist perspective, for example, in Norris 1990. I think that most of his criticism is actually based on a serious misunderstanding of Baudrillard’s style — especially the irony and sarcasm that he uses so frequently. To give one example, his often (mis)quoted article from the *Libération* on the Gulf War (“Did the Gulf War really happen?”) was definitively *not an apology* for the Gulf War and its disastrous consequences for the civilian population — Baudrillard was simply calmly explaining the mechanisms of media input and filtering, the ways in which this horrible event was presented as a “media spectacle” for the enjoyment of the masses, a kind of hyperreality that the holders of power wanted to project. In that sense, the question of the “reality” of the Gulf War is perfectly justified. It was *real* for the victims and direct participants. It was presented as *unreal* for the masses in the Western countries. Baudrillard’s critical position towards this kind of (mis)representation of events is more than obvious.

On the other hand, Norris’ observations about the connection between the dismal fate of the May 1968 movement in France and its connection with the origins of postmodern debates in France (especially Lyotard) are extremely important and accurate. It seems, however, that Norris excludes Derrida from the postmodern movement, and, as a result, presents his work in quite a positive light. For some serious misconceptions about Derrida (especially in the Anglo-American academia), an

François Lyotard,<sup>57</sup> as well as the post-postmodernist philosophy of Jean Baudrillard.<sup>58</sup> Of course, not many of these thinkers would actually refer to themselves as “Postmodern” — Baudrillard in particular has rejected the label strenuously (if not very successfully).<sup>59</sup>

Some of the criticism that the “postmodern” anthropologists get is from the perspective that things could somehow be different, that if only anthropology could be done in the same way that it was being done 30 or so years ago, some of the questions concerning its validity, methodological foundations, and claims to universal knowledge could just be ignored. (Needless to say, 30 or more years ago things were not that simple and clear-cut, as the critics would sometimes like it to appear — one could only look at Malinowski’s critique of colonialist strategies from the 1930s [cf. Stocking 1991: 55-61], or later writings of such a “classical” anthropologist as Evans-Pritchard, etc. The gap between “the good old days” and contemporary theory is actually very narrow, and to a large extent

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excellent summary is by Jay 1988; for the criticism from the neo-Marxist perspective, cf. Jameson 1991). The reasons for some of these serious (and perhaps deliberate) misunderstandings are outlined below in this section by McRobbie and Di Leonardo.

<sup>57</sup> Even though Lyotard himself credits the Anglo-American critics like Ihab Hassan for the actual “invention” of the term!

<sup>58</sup> As far as the political criticism of “Postmodernists” as essentially reactionary and oriented towards the preservation of the existing exploitative power structures (especially Jameson 1991) is concerned, one should only look at the critical engagement of Derrida to see the futility of this line of criticism. As for the “Postmodernists” from other areas of the world, I should note that most people engaged in a futile (but brave and honest) attempt to provide reason in the carnage of former Yugoslavia, were exactly “Postmodernists” (Dr. Miladin Životić and Obrad Savić in Belgrade, Dr. Rastko Močnik in Ljubljana, to name just a few).

On the other hand, and among the scholars well known in the West, Zygmunt Bauman, whose critical and intellectual engagement is beyond any doubt, embraced the “consequences of postmodernism.” Bauman sees the fall of communism as definitive proof that the societies based on the ideals of modernity are impossible (1992: 156 ff, 1992: 221).

<sup>59</sup> The latest label attached to him is the “Quentin Tarantino of the philosophy world.” Among previous ones: “supermarket philosopher, intellectual imposter, dangerous nihilist, postmodern guru, reactionary, fascist.” (Street 1995: 4)

it can be attributed to the changes in the contemporary world — or at least the changes in our ways of perceiving and referring to it.)

One recent critic notes that the volume *Writing Culture* and similar products of contemporary anthropological theory are

clearly the product of an explosive mixture of poststructuralist thought with its emphasis on a textually based interdisciplinary approach to the production of social knowledge, and an emergent self-reflexivity on the part of anthropologists.

(Thomas 1992: 1-2)

This brings us to the question of social involvement. One of the main criticisms that the “postmodern” thinkers get is that they are actually too abstract, too much removed from “real life,” from the “basics” of their field. In the words of another critic:

Despite the postmodernists’ own desire to avoid universal claims and despite their stated opposition to such claims, some universalist assumptions creep back into their work. Thus, postmodernism, despite its stated efforts to avoid the problems of the European modernism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at best manages to criticize these theories without putting anything in their place. For those of us who want to understand the world systematically in order to change it, postmodernist theories at their best give little guidance.

(Hartsock 1987: 190)

The problem with this kind of critique is that it wants a specific theoretical approach (or, as I see it, a set of approaches) as some sort of political guidance. To go back to Feyerabend (1993), theory can never *guide* actions — actions can only inform the theory and make it more appropriate. It is nice to have a certain “theoretical principle” that one adheres to, but this principle might be of absolutely no relevance to one’s (actual or perceived) place in the world. Any action should first be formulated *in practical terms*, theory can only follow up on this. In short, I think that the main problem that Nancy Hartsock has is that she believes that it



is possible “to understand the world systematically.” This can never be done (except in some kind of an empathetic *Einfühlung*) — the only thing that we can understand is how is our surrounding (“the world”) influenced by our actions (thoughts, experiments, etc.). Nothing more and nothing less.

But postmodern approaches also have their proponents. According to Angela McRobbie,

Postmodernism is a concept for understanding social change. It seems feeble to suggest it, but maybe the reason for the hostility to the concept in Britain lies at least partly in the abysmal fate of social science research and intellectual work in general in the UK during and after the Thatcher years, where the nature of these constraints inevitably produced defensive political and intellectual responses (...) Thus while there has been a debate about ‘new ways of living’ and about post-Fordism as well as one on fragmentation and identity, there has been little opportunity to examine in any depth the lived ‘condition of postmodernity’. As a result the really engaged debate on how best to understand this refiguring of society was never able to take place.

(McRobbie 1994: 62)

What happened instead, she argues, was an almost instinctive entrenchment of many intellectuals and their immediate rejection of the “Post” movement without actually examining its premises.

This is similar to the situation in American academic circles in the last few decades, as summed up by Micaela di Leonardo:

The American Rightward shift, coupled with demographic fluctuations and the Reagan administration’s cutoff of many social programs, had immediate effects on American colleges and universities. Social science (excluding economics) and liberal arts programs lost student enrollments to business majors and to professional schools as undergraduates and graduates responded to economic insecurity and rightward shift through attempts to gain “practical ” training (...) At the same time, rightward shift and funding crises led anthropology departments to focus on shifting

“traditional” fields and topics, and thus to neglect feminist, Marxist, and American-focused research.

(Di Leonardo 1991b: 18)

In this context, Micaela di Leonardo sees postmodern and poststructuralist approaches (she uses the terms interchangeably — for example, 1991b: 25) as quite dangerous, as some kind of a diversion keeping anthropology from going “back on the track” (or back to “feminist, Marxist, and American-focused research”<sup>60</sup>). She adopts a line of criticism that is not dissimilar to the one (by Ernest Gellner) which will be examined more closely later in this chapter. For example:

Poststructuralist arguments, by their very nature, attempt to destabilize received conceptions of science, order, society, and the self. Poststructuralism is antiscience, antitheory; it levels our distinctions among truth and falsehood, science and myth. It denies the existence of social order or real human selves, declaring the death of the subject (....) it cannot affirm any truth or claim any political stance. It can only deconstruct.

(Di Leonardo 1991b: 24)<sup>61</sup>

But she is already part of the postmodern (and poststructuralist) culture itself.<sup>62</sup> The volume that she edited (Di Leonardo 1991a) is being advertised as *a book dealing with postmodern anthropology*.<sup>63</sup> Postmodernism sells. And its critics are part of its marketing strategy. The flourishing of postmodern theory in

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<sup>60</sup> Which probably leaves anthropologists regarding themselves as postmodern and doing research exactly in these areas somewhat bewildered.

<sup>61</sup> Of course, I should note that “destabilizing perceived conceptions of science, order, society, and the self” *is* what postmodernist approaches are all about — hardly any postmodern thinker would disagree with this phrase, except that it would be regarded as a compliment — not as a critical remark!

<sup>62</sup> Although I doubt that she would agree with this statement, this is the point that Donna Haraway makes, but I will return to it in the penultimate section of this chapter.

<sup>63</sup> I am not implying that Di Leonardo has in any way consciously influenced this marketing strategy!



practically all areas of contemporary culture makes it difficult to avoid the paradoxicality of certain questions — not the least being the fact that even critics of postmodernism must enter the postmodern discourse (and use some of the specifically postmodernist discourse-strategies) if they want to make their point.

The fact is that there are no sacred things in postmodern discourses. Everything is open to discussion and debate, everything should be questioned. *No grand narrative should be accepted simply because someone in a position of power says so!* But this may sound too horrible for the proponents of abstract humanism. Their belief in the sanctity (and the very existence) of something vaguely described as “human nature,” combined with a vaguely leftist orientation leave them shocked by statements of postmodern thinkers (or thinkers of the postmodern) like the following:

They [the masses] are neither good conductors of the political, nor good conductors of the social, nor good conductors of meaning in general. Everything flows through them, everything magnetises them, but diffuses throughout them without leaving a trace. And, ultimately, the appeal of the masses has always gone unanswered. They do not radiate; on the contrary, they absorb all radiation from the outlying constellations of State, History, Culture, Meaning. They are inertia, the strength of the inertia, the strength of the neutral.

(Baudrillard 1983: 2)<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> I do not claim that this is a typical postmodern utterance, but it is statements like this that produce most horror for the socially engaged critics of postmodernism. On the other hand, Baudrillard is often criticized for some things (exemplified by the critics like Norris, Jameson, Benhabib, among others) that are associated with postmodernism in general. Baudrillard's apparent total disrespect for “the masses,” his attributing to them of only an endless inertia can be easily misunderstood and misinterpreted as the advocacy of some kind of society or a system where only a privileged few would make all the relevant decisions. Although he is quite disillusioned with the Left, this is definitively *not* Baudrillard's position. I cannot see how a careful reading of Baudrillard (the whole books/texts/interviews/etc.) can justify such a misinterpretation.

Baudrillard's "silent majorities" are part (an integral one!) of our world — and the examples connected with a poster advertisement in Slovenia (to which I will refer in one of the next chapters) are definitive proof for this. To call this politically "reactionary" is to totally misunderstand Baudrillard: in order to understand our interaction with the world, we have to analyze (*sine ira et studio*) some of the concepts of that very same world. If that means spelling out some painful truths, so be it. Anyone that lived in the former communist countries can understand very well a kind of inertia that Baudrillard is talking about.<sup>65</sup> The masses allow themselves to be led, they allow "truths" to be pre-packaged and delivered to them as "neutral." Any questions regarding the "technologies of power" or the source(s) of the dominant discourses are strongly discouraged. By merely depicting the behavioral patterns of the masses, Baudrillard commits a horrible crime against the idealized images of "people's power," "people's quest for liberty" (or Truth, Harmony, Reason, etc.), against the visions of societies where people will know how to "rationally" determine "the nature of things." Well, that mystical entity called "the people" (or masses) simply does not operate that way. This is something that I feel I have the right to say, having lived through some interesting political (as well as cultural) changes endorsed by the masses — and living through something does make it look different from the image created in the ivory towers of faraway<sup>66</sup> academics. The fall of communism in Eastern and Central Europe was followed by the enthusiastic endorsement (by the masses) of the variety of extremely nationalistic, chauvinistic and xenophobic policies, some of them culminating in the horrors of

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<sup>65</sup> I should stress that this kind of behavior is not limited to former communist countries — it is widespread through the Western countries (especially the US). In a way, it forms the basis of the Western "democracies" — people that allow themselves to be "led," people that do not want to be bothered with too many unpleasant questions — these are the kinds of people that are and will be good subjects. They are every government's dream.

<sup>66</sup> In both a physical (geographical) and cultural sense.

war in the former Yugoslavia. The masses in the West have no problem with their governments invading some countries (Panama), bombing others (Iraq), while shutting their eyes to the horrendous atrocities committed by their “allies” (hence the silence surrounding East Timor or Tibet). The “unification” of Europe was followed by the creation of numerous barriers that would discourage (or make it as difficult as possible) for any “non-European” (i. e., citizen of any country not belonging to the EU) to travel to the territories of the EU countries. These policies are brought into effect by the governments that represent *the will of the people*. So why give this strange entity the respect that it had in left-wing political theory? Why not expose it for what it really is? Even if that is done in a somewhat playful (à la Baudrillard) way.

Postmodern thinkers are too often charged with “playfulness” and “disrespect,” with “not offering anything instead of the concepts that they deconstruct.” But what is wrong with playfulness? And why is it necessary to offer any universal concepts? Why not leave this to specific situations, to specific cultures, to specific social situations? Contemporary anthropology, I would like to think, does not need stone tablets. It needs understanding.

It is important to stress here (and I will come back to this point later in this chapter) the essential *plurality* of postmodernist approaches — different theoretical approach(es) are valid — within certain social/cultural/academic parameters. Any theory and any theoretical approach is valid within its scope of research if it answers reasonably well the questions that a researcher puts forward. Some would call this attitude a relativistic one. I prefer to call it anarchic.<sup>67</sup> In Paul Feyerabend’s famous (often misinterpreted) phrase:

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<sup>67</sup> Of course, naive anarchism believes that since there can be no definitive methodology of any scientific discipline, all methodological approaches are equally valid. This is not my position. Obviously, there is a difference between the approaches that promote individual freedoms and rights and approaches that set out to annihilate these rights and to promote different kinds of totalitarianism. I believe that it is both my duty and an obligation to actively promote the former

“anything goes.” The only boundary set in the research should be the one concerning its results.

Once this boundary is set, it is easy to go forward (or backward, depending on preference). It is necessary to establish the boundary in order to grasp fully the consequences of our living in hyperreality. By *hyperreality*, I mean the notion of reality which is mediated (as well as presented, distorted, etc.) by different discourses and different media.<sup>68</sup> It is a reality that is *constructed* — and the point is to understand that this constructing is always artificial and completely arbitrary. It is with the critique of this constructing (or its *deconstructing*) that I am primarily concerned. The notion of hyperreality is something distinctively postmodern, a concept that is constructed in somewhat different ways by Jean Baudrillard (1987, 1988*a*, 1990, 1992)<sup>69</sup> and Umberto Eco (1986). It implies something artificial (consciously constructed), but something which is in itself (and by itself) conscious of its own artificiality and at the same time able to play with it. It also implies awareness that the reality that we believe to have hold (or at least some understanding) of is only a construction. Although both Eco and Baudrillard associate this concept primarily with the visual and semantic paradoxes that arise in their respective contacts with American (US)

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ones. In situations like this, there is no point putting things in terms of *personal dislike* — if someone denies to someone else her or his very right to exist, academic arguments should leave the field for other (more active and more personal) forms of engagement.

<sup>68</sup> Or, as put forth by Norris (who criticizes the concept): “an age of mass-media simulation, opinion-poll feedback, total publicity and so forth, with the result that it is no longer possible (if indeed it ever was) to distinguish truth from falsehood, or cling to those old ‘enlightenment’ values of reason, critique, and adequate ideas” (1990: 23). Of course, the concept is, for Norris, just another neo-capitalist and reactionary trick to evade the critical discussion of the world (societies, cultures, etc.) that we live in. He fails to see how (especially in the Eastern Europe) this notion (as well as the ones derived from it) enabled the criticism of reactionary and rightist ideologies. (He also fails to see that all political systems are oppressive — although not in the same way, but that is another question.)

<sup>69</sup> A critical and very useful appraisal of Baudrillard on hyperreality is given by Luke 1991.

culture, one is reminded here of the way in which Umberto Eco describes postmodernism in the *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*:

I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, "I love you madly," because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly." At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this, she will have received a declaration of love all the same. Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated, both will consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony... But both will have succeeded, once again, in speaking of love.

(Eco 1984b: 67-68)

This is also a reasonably good explanation of what hyperreality entails, the paradoxical situation in which we are put even as we are aware of it. The main importance of this notion of hyperreality is precisely this recognition of the unsaid, unspoken and yet forever present, the idea that the innocence which people believed they had is lost.

This concept can help one understand gender relations in societies where a kind of a similar "double talk" is involved — as I will show later in the case of Prespa in Macedonia. Toni Flores sees what she calls "women's culture" as examples of hyperreality; these have, according to her, become the vehicles of a specific, different cultural discourses — quite distinct from "men's culture." This

accounts for a “schizophrenic peak in the modern, industrial, abstract, violent, imperialistic, patriarchal world” (Flores 1991: 141).<sup>70</sup> She continues:

At the same time, “feminine” possibilities have not disappeared but have more or less “gone underground.” carried by the woman’s culture, they continue hidden, silent, disvalued, subversive, and absolutely necessary for the support of the whole social order. One might think of the feminine as a recessive gene, a set of characteristics that remain viable and possible in the genotype even when not showing up in the more obvious phenotype.

(Flores 1991: 142)

To go back to the question of (personal) social involvement, most social scientists prefer not to get directly socially involved in the political processes in their own countries, and particularly countries where they are doing research. Apart from obvious risks (for project/career/life), they assume that direct engagement would somehow blur their supposedly “objective” vision of the “reality” that they are observing. As already noted above, I do not think that anything like “objectivity” ever exists. However, this approach is likely to scare off (and perhaps instantly alienate) scholars that do believe in some form of social engagement, based on the Enlightenment ideals of rationality and humanism. My opinion about the concept and the meaning of “rationality” is similar to “objectivity.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This can be related to what Langdon Winner calls *apraxia*: “the ultimate horror, a condition to be avoided at all costs” (1977: 185-187, *passim*). This condition refers to the stopping and breakdown in modern (Western) society, and feminist discourses can be seen as one way of avoiding this state.

<sup>71</sup> Enlightenment is a tricky notion which I will not discuss in any detail here — I just wish to point to the fact that when this concept is used in anthropology, it almost invariably suggests a specific kind of the Enlightenment, French in origin, and with Rousseau, Voltaire and Diderot as its main protagonists. German (even though Immanuel Kant is the founding father of contemporary Western philosophy!), British and Italian (with some exception of Giambattista Vico) Enlightenments are usually completely ignored, as well as such influential French-language thinkers as Holbach (for the



Humanism is another big catchword for the criticism of postmodern approaches. To label someone as *anti-humanist* is almost as bad as labelling him/her racist, fascist, etc. What is usually meant by the great advocates of the concept of “humanism” is not clearly defined (most of them hardly bother to read some of the basic Renaissance and Enlightenment works), but it is supposed to represent a set of fixed norms and values that postulate belief in the universality of human nature, sanctity of human life, as well as belief that there are some universally set and understood human rights that must be respected. Of course, since these things are not always (or, some sceptics would say, not usually) self-evident, people need convincing, so someone takes charge of governing and convincing people what is in their best interests. Hence, we have a variety of highly repressive political systems, of which Nazism is the most illustrative example. I will not repeat here the arguments that Adorno and Horkheimer put forth in late 1944 in their *Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, but it seems to me worth noting that not only great scientific discoveries (and the whole “industrial revolution”), but colonialism and Nazi death camps were also products of the universalist notion of “humanism.”

Reality<sup>72</sup> is, as usual, much more complicated than someone’s wishful thinking. There is no such thing as an universal “human nature” waiting to be discovered and described by anthropologists. The very amount of data coming from the different sub-fields makes it impossible for a single researcher to cover successfully all the areas and sub-fields that are being included in anthropology (for example, the notion of anthropology as a “four fields” discipline is still

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general treatment of this period, I refer to Cassirer 1951). Foucault’s article “What is Enlightenment?” from 1984 is also quite illuminating.

<sup>72</sup> My use of the term “reality” is actually a combination of the ordinary (I am almost tempted to say: common sense — but not in the context discussed in one of the next sections of this chapter!) usage and the recognition that there are different and equally legitimate (valid within the specific context) “realities” based on one’s cultural, psychological, gender, ethnical, etc. backgrounds.



prevalent in the US). As the data in specific disciplines gain in relevance (for example, genetic studies, molecular biology and biochemistry for physical or biological anthropology), so increased specialization is a fact even within the most conservative academic and research programs. However, the crossing of traditional boundaries is never easy, and since many anthropologists have lived for long believing that they indeed are the "super scientists" (or at least as close as one could get to them), they have never accepted the kind of self-questioning mechanisms that have enabled other disciplines (like sociology, for example) critically to examine their *praxis* while at the same time gaining access to other areas and other fields of knowledge (cf. Grimshaw and Hart 1994; Scott 1994). The pretension that someone (or something) can be omniscient has been deeply rooted in anthropology, and this pretension is responsible for most misunderstandings and deliberate misreadings of postmodernism. The "postmodern turn" in anthropology (Fabian 1991: 258) postulates anthropology as,

a field which examines the variety (or lack of variety) of human culture and society by giving reasoned accounts of it. As such, it is, like history, basically a literary enterprise making use of variety of rhetoric strategies... Anthropology should enjoy at least the same freedom of imagination that has been demonstrated to be the source of progress in the natural sciences.

(Fabian 1991: 106-107)

As with any freedom (and following the famous distinction of Erich Fromm), one should distinguish between what this freedom of expression is *for* and what it is *from*. The distinction can be given in purely negative terms, but also in a sense of defining the area and the fruitful approaches more closely. Some of the criticism against the proponents of the "literary" or "text-centered" approach accuse these authors of not being specific enough about what they are trying to do. In my view, some of the serious misunderstandings that critics like

Hobart have about this approach<sup>73</sup> is that they believe that the proponents of the “literary” or “interpretative” approach are trying to impose it as *the* way of doing anthropology today.

This very concept of *imposing* is in sharp contrast to one of the main facets of postmodern theories: namely, the concept that there is a plurality of truths (and, consequently, a plurality of theoretically *equally* valid approaches).<sup>74</sup> As already noted above, the practical value of each and every approach will be determined within the specific context where one is doing one’s research — so the only measure of success will be to what extent different approaches help in (or facilitate) one’s intended research. Different research strategies can bring successful results. As pointed out by the “anarchistic” methodological approach of Paul Feyerabend (for example, 1987, 1993), this context-bound and context-based research strategy has been adumbrated and used by some of the most influential physicists and “classical” scientists from the late 19th and early 20th century (Bolzano, Mach, Einstein, Bohr), but has still tended to be largely ignored. The great figures of Western science were quite well aware of the *relativity* of concepts on which their theories were based (as well as the incommensurability of their theories with alternative systems of knowledge, such as the ones outlined in and referred to by myth or fiction, for example), and contemporary rationalist crusaders have become painfully aware of these difficulties through the problems opened by quantum physics, physics of sub-atomic particles, as well as phenomena such as the Heisenberg’s principle of

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<sup>73</sup> Actually, there are several different approaches, and the authors frequently lumped together are frequently in sharp disagreement with each other. However, most of the criticism is taking the “Postmodern” or “literary” approach to be a single identifiable and unified category, in total disregard of what the authors involved really say.

<sup>74</sup> I understand this to be one of the main criticisms of Friedman (1987) directed against authors like Geertz. Friedman accuses them of rejecting evolutionary approaches, while at the same time positioning themselves as *the* dominant anthropologists (creators of the current metanarrative). This is not my understanding of what, for example, Geertz’s writings are all about.

indeterminacy. All these developments have helped to shatter the rationalist picture that has been dominant in the Western science and philosophy since the 17th century, when an essentially tolerant and pluralistic tradition was replaced by another one, based on principles of methodological monism, objectivity and universalist truth-claims.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU KNOW (AND WHY?): TWO GREAT WESTERN TRADITIONS

Postmodern science — by concerning itself by such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, “*fracta*,” catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes — is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical. It is changing the word *knowledge*, while expressing how such a change can take place. It is producing not the known, but the unknown.

(Lyotard 1984: 60)

The last sentence of the above epigraph is of particular importance. How can anything produce the unknown? How can one know the unknown? How many paradoxes can one stand before slipping into the (academic, imaginary, or medical) schizophrenia or naïve positivism or something similar? To answer this question, one needs to go back, to trace Western intellectual history back to the time of the great “rationalist” break in the 17th century.

The “discovery” of the New World, as well as the debates that followed on the issue of slavery<sup>75</sup> permanently changed the Western world. The encounter

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<sup>75</sup> It is a well known fact that before the 16th century, race was simply not an issue in the Western European art — and, although infrequently, representatives of other races were represented in sculpture or painting.

with “the other” brought shock and amazement along with large scale ethnocide and at the same time ecocide, but it also broadened intellectual horizons.<sup>76</sup>

The debates that arose immediately after the Spanish conquest of America are primarily associated with the name and life of Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566), traditionally regarded as a symbol (or at least, a figure of immense importance) of the struggle for dignity of the American Indians (or, in the current politically correct usage, Native Americans).<sup>77</sup> Actually, Las Casas can be seen (in a historical context) as a continuation of the efforts of his fellow Dominicans, Antonio de Montesinos and Pedro de Córdoba, who were already refusing to hear the confessions of the Spanish settlers at Santo Domingo (Haiti), based on what they have considered to be inhuman treatment of the native population. Las Casas went a little further in asking for the abolition of *encomiendas* and *repartimientos*,<sup>78</sup> as something in itself evil and immoral. In a letter to the King Carlos V in 1516, he wrote that “it is better to lose all the lands overseas, than to allow that such horrible injustices be done in the name of the king”. With the support of the Dominican theologians from the University of Salamanca,<sup>79</sup> Las

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<sup>76</sup> I am *not* implying that this *ethnocide* and *ecocide* was a necessary or in any way justifiable price to be paid for this *broadening of intellectual horizons* — I am just stating this as a fact.

<sup>77</sup> This brief account is based primarily on Boskovic 1990c: 15-16; but cf. also Hanke 1959; Boskovic 1997 and (in a slightly “Postmodern” context) Todorov 1984.

<sup>78</sup> Without getting into the detailed explanation of these important institutions, I will only say that they refer to a series of regulations that basically connected (tied) native inhabitants to the lands that were purchased by settlers or given away as gifts, thus keeping the native population practically as slaves.

<sup>79</sup> Among the most notable ones were Bartolomé de Carranza, Melchior Cano, and Domingo de Soto. They were trying to prove that Pope Alexander VI's bull “*Inter cætera*” from 1494 was valid only in the spiritual sense — giving to the Spanish and the Portuguese the right to christianize native population in the territories that they discover, but not to treat these territories and their inhabitants as their own property. The Dominican General, Thomas de Caeta, wrote in his commentary to the edition of the *Summa theologica* of Thomas Aquinas that there are actually three kinds of infidels: 1/ the ones that are legally and factually subjects of the Christians and live in the Christian kingdoms (Moors, Jews); 2/ the ones that are legally but not factually Christian subjects because they seize

Casas eventually succeeded (with great help of the Spanish royalty!) in arguing for laws that abolish *encomiendas* and that grant (at least formally, if not in practice) freedom to the native population, in 1542.

However, the theoretical question of the use of force in converting the native population to the “true faith” and “true God” had already been raised by the lawyer from Córdoba, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, in his treatise “*Democrates alter sive de iustis belli causis*” (Rome, 1535). Sepúlveda stressed the fact that the Indians were, in his opinion, “infidels, barbarians, and slaves by their very nature” — and all this led to the famous discussion between him and Las Casas in 1548 at Valladolid in Spain. In this discussion, Las Casas claimed that the differentiation of the civilized peoples and the barbarians could not be based on ethnic, cultural and religious differences, but on the fact that there were people who respected freedom and the natural rights of others and people that do not respect these rights. Although the royal auditors never officially declared the outcome of this debate, the fact that shortly after the debate (in 1552) Las Casas published his *Brevísima relación...*, while Ginés de Sepúlveda never received permission to publish any of his subsequent polemical works, speaks for itself.<sup>80</sup> However, this was one of the last instances that voices and concerns of the other were so publicly respected in the West European cultural and political

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Christian territories (Turks); and 3/ the ones that are neither legally nor factually Christian subjects (Indians). He concluded that the second kind (Turks) should be treated like enemies, but the third kind (Indians) are legal owners of their own lands, and cannot be subjected to force. These and similar statements were recognized in the bull of the Pope Paul III, “*Sublimus Deus*” of the June 2, 1537: “Indians and all the peoples that are yet to be met by Christians, even if they live with no faith in Christ, should not be deprived of their freedom or their worldly possessions... They cannot be forced into slavery, and to the faith of Christ they should be introduced by the preaching of the Divine Word and the example of the decent life.”

<sup>80</sup> Of course, one should not forget that Las Casas on the theoretically similar grounds justified the slavery (and slave trade, which was becoming a profitable business venture) in Africa!

discourse.<sup>81</sup> Another tradition, another way of obtaining knowledge was about to impose itself as a master narrative (or metanarrative) of the time. The burden of dealing (and answering to the challenges of) the unknown had become too heavy.

The unknown that was introduced to the Western world in the late 15th and early 16th century were other worlds. Of course, the contacts and the interchange between Western and non-Western cultures had a long history, but it was always limited by sheer distance or in some cases simple cultural incompatibility (mostly based on the premises of different religions or different ideological systems). In the case of the Western European expansion that started in late 15th and early 16th century with Columbus reaching the Antilles in 1492 and Vasco da Gama sailing around Africa in 1498, the West put itself in a position of absolute domination and control, its master narrative was to become a master narrative of the whole world that it wanted to subjugate; it had appropriated (“discovered”) new worlds, and something had to be done about it.

What was done was essentially a rationalist revolution, initiated by René Descartes in philosophy and Sir Isaac Newton in science. This revolution claimed the separation between the mind and the body, it started to treat different systems as *always* incompatible, different systems of values as *mutually exclusive*, and also it set up a standard (of the Western colonial powers in expansion — although, to be clear, neither Descartes or Newton were particularly involved or interested in the colonial expansion) that was to become the standard for judging and evaluating all other (different) cultures. This stood in sharp contrast to the humanist ideals of the Renaissance (in fact, Toulmin calls this

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<sup>81</sup> For an excellent account of the Western “discovery” of the other related to America, see Mason 1990.



revolution "Retreat from the Renaissance" [1990: 30]), and it has made several important breaks with the earlier tradition.<sup>82</sup>

First of all, the emphasis shifts from the oral to the written, rhetoric losing its position as a legitimate field of study, and the stress is put on the *rational* presentation of arguments, in the sense of producing *proofs*. Who presents the arguments, in which context, to what audience, becomes totally irrelevant. Decontextualization enters the West European science and humanities. Secondly, there is a shift from the particular to the universal; in the world that was becoming (colonially) globalized, particular cases and situations lost their importance, the laws are set with universalist claims (primarily in the context of raging religious wars in Europe).

If respecting the other was implicit in the moral and philosophical theories of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, from the 17th century onwards, this respect became irreconcilable with the strategies of domination, where the other had to be subsumed under the General Law of Reason. There is an important shift from the timely to the timeless, closely associated with the new strategies. While in previous centuries scholars paid much more attention to the *context* of specific situations (following the advice from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*), this interest is lost in the rationalist revolution. Finally, the shift in all the major theoretical debates (both in the sciences and in the humanities) changes from the local to the general, all in accordance with the new universalist claims.

Although Toulmin looks at this break primarily from the perspective of the *actual political and historical context* of the 17th century Europe (which led to the savage war that from 1618 until 1648 raged in Germany and Bohemia), his arguments deal with the characteristics of Modernity itself, its emphasis on rationalization, the pursuit of Truth, and the quest for certainty that eventually

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<sup>82</sup> In this section of the chapter, I am closely following Stephen Toulmin's account, so I am not giving specific page references.

became self-fulfilling. It is against this background of universalist claims and the belief in “objectively” existing knowledge (usually associated with the idea and concept of Modernity [cf. Toulmin 1990, Bauman 1993, etc.]) that postmodern social scientists, humanists, and philosophers react. The postmodern reaction might be understood in terms of Rorty’s (1980, 1989) reference to the “edifying” procedure of gaining knowledge; one that distrusts the notion of essential rightness and single and universal logic, one that is open to relativism and scepticism, one that is situationalist and subjective, one that constantly doubts even its own premises.

Modernity, by comparison, seems never to have entertained similar doubts as to the universal grounding of its status. The hierarchy of values imposed upon the world administered by the north-western tip of the European peninsula was so firm, and supported by powers so enormously overwhelming, that for a couple of centuries it remained the baseline of the world vision, rather than an overtly debated problem. Seldom brought to the level of consciousness, it remained the all-powerful ‘taken-for-granted’ of the era. It was evident to everybody except the blind and the ignorant that the West was superior to the East, white to black, civilized to crude, cultured to uneducated, sane to insane, healthy to sick, man to woman, normal to criminal, more to less, riches to austerity, high productivity to low productivity, high culture to low culture. All these ‘evidences’ are now gone. Not a single one remains unchallenged. What is more, we can see now that they did not hold in separation from each other; they made sense together, as manifestations of the same power complex, the same power structure of the world, which retained credibility as long as the structure remained intact, but were unlikely to survive its demise.

(Bauman 1993: 135-136)

The extent of this break with the earlier tradition is becoming clear when the others are also able to voice their concerns. In the second half of the 16th

century, Montaigne's *Essais* (cf. a study by Frame 1969) discuss customs and rites of other peoples (including cannibalism), different ethical and moral questions of the time, as well as the pleasures of everyday life (including sex).<sup>83</sup> Only a century later such writings would have been unimaginable.

From the 17th century onwards, the prevalent belief was that there can be such a thing as universal knowledge (or a universal way of achieving it). This belief was for the most part prevalent in the French Enlightenment,<sup>84</sup> and it tended to influence all aspects of Western European civilization as it spread in attempt to appropriate and understand the other worlds. *Knowledge* became a magical catchword. What could be *known* and by what means came to be the objective that the most brilliant minds went after. The problem of *the unknown*, as well as the problem of objective limitations and relativism of *any* knowledge was for the most part denied. As much as the defining narrative before the "discovery" of other worlds has been the recognition of the differences between different cultures and emphasis on the specific *context*, the dominating narrative since the rationalist revolution has become a decontextualizing quest for certainty. This can be understood as a form of "Enlightenment rationalist fundamentalism" (or *Enlightenment rationalism*, with all of its neopositivistic overtones), one of whose most important representatives in contemporary anthropology and social theory was Ernest Gellner. I take Gellner as example both for his formal influence (after all, he was Professor and Chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge) and for his learned, often polemical and frequently entertaining writings — whose emphasis stands in sharp contrast to the sketches of modernity and postmodernity as presented by scholars like Bauman (1991, 1992).

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<sup>83</sup> Montaigne has been associated with the origins of feminism (Insdorf 1977).

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Kant's "*Was ist Aufklärung?*," as well as Foucault's answer to it.

## ANTHROPOLOGY AND COMMON SENSE: THE WAY WE WERE

It is almost impossible to give a coherent definition or account of postmodernism (...) All one can say is that it is a kind of hysteria of subjectivity which goes beyond 'Joyce, Hemingway, Woolf, et. al.', who evidently did not go far enough: their 'conceit of an interiorized and distinctive subjectivity... both drew from and stood at a distance from normal speech and identity'. Far too orderly, it would seem.

(Gellner 1992: 29)

One of the important influences of the rationalist revolution described in the previous section has been its insistence on a set of supposedly shared values and perspectives that were (are) so obvious that anyone (with just a small conscious effort) could see. This is what I will refer to as Western common sense, and it is a perspective quite commensurable with the concepts of Western common sense outlined by Bauman (cf. *supra*, p. 58). According to common sense, there are no serious doubts about us, the world, our place in it, our distinctiveness from nature, our need to explain and *define* everything rationally and logically, etc.

However, even the harshest critics of postmodern approaches recognize that the present world is in the state of inherent instability, with three dominant forces contesting for power. According to Gellner (1992: 2), these three contestants are:

- 1 Religious fundamentalism.
- 2 Relativism, exemplified for instance by the recent fashion of 'postmodernism'.
- 3 Enlightenment rationalism, or rationalist fundamentalism.

I have already outlined the goals, origins, and agenda associated with the third force (with which Gellner aligns himself), Gellner offers a sound (if somewhat brief) account of the first one, but what about the haunting spirit of relativism? How to combat that supreme evil, that threatens common sense, questions the accepted logic and constantly raises doubts?

Gellner recognizes postmodernism as “a contemporary movement” (1992: 22), laments over its lack of clarity, is a bit unclear “about the attitude of the movement to the human subject” (1992: 23), and generally characterizes it with “[t]he notions that everything is a ‘text’, that the basic material of texts, societies and almost anything is meaning, that meanings are there to be decoded or ‘deconstructed’, that the notion of objective reality is suspect” (*ibid.*). The main problem with postmodernism is that it brings into current theoretical, cultural, artistic, ideological, and all other debates the concept of relativism.

Postmodernism would seem to be rather clearly in favour of relativism, in as far as it is capable of clarity, and hostile to the idea of unique, exclusive, objective, external or transcendent truth. Truth is elusive, polymorphous, inward, subjective... and perhaps a few further things as well. Straightforward it is not. My real concern is with *relativism*: the postmodernist movement, which is an ephemeral cultural fashion, is of interest as a living and contemporary specimen of relativism, which as such is of some importance and will remain with us for a long time.

(Gellner 1992: 24)

The above quoted paragraph summarizes the agenda of one of the most influential and prominent critics of postmodernism from an anthropological perspective. It is not the “movement” itself which is a problem, it is what it brings with itself. Political liberation and cognitive subjectivity which have come to characterize the post-World War II world are among the enemies of common sense, at least insofar as they are not presented in a set of completely

unambiguous, logically coherent, and scientifically positive set of axioms. Even worse, they tend to culminate in anthropology in a “dialogic” form, allowing for (at least a possibility of) the multiple voices (not only the one of the anthropologist, but also the ones of the people that he/she studies) to be heard in their own words.

In the end, the operational meaning of postmodernism in anthropology seems to be something like this: a refusal (in practice, rather selective) to countenance any objective facts, any independent social structures, and their replacement by a pursuit of ‘meanings’, both those of the objects of inquiry and of the inquirer. There is thus a double stress on subjectivity: the world-creation by the person studied, and the text-creation by the investigator. ‘Meaning’ is less a tool of analysis than a conceptual intoxicant, an instrument of self-titillation. The investigator demonstrates both his initiation into the mysteries of hermeneutics, and the difficulty of the enterprise, by complex and convoluted prose, peppered with allusions to a high proportion of the authors of the World’s 100 Great Books, and also to the latest fashionable scribes of the Left Bank.

(Gellner 1992: 29-30)

Although Gellner quite precisely notes that the objections the anthropologists associated with postmodernism mostly have to do with the Cartesian legacy (1992: 37-38), his misunderstanding of the whole idea (or, should I say, the whole set of ideas) can be matched only by his contempt for the representatives of this “Movement.” He believes that the main goal of postmodernists is to absolutize knowledge (from a relativist perspective) and appropriate power which has been safely kept in the hands of the rational revolutionaries. In blurring different genres and different authors, he concludes that there are two distinct, but intertwined arguments that the whole new tradition puts forward. The first one “is that the pursuit of objectivity is really spurious, and a form of domination: the observer insulates the objects and sits in judgement on it,” while the other one is “the argument that the world has become



more complex, and that the separation of roles is *no longer* possible” (1992: 41). Starting from completely different sets of beliefs and values (exactly the ones to which postmodernism is a reaction), Gellner accepts the second argument, but remains convinced that it only means that the world is more complicated now and that it is therefore more difficult to get to the objective truth (or reality).

The main problem with relativism is that it entails nihilism (p. 49), as well as denying the possibility of morality and knowledge outside the limits and the specific context of a specific culture.<sup>85</sup> According to Gellner, it also misrepresents the present world: “As a characterization of the predicament and difficulties and anxiety faced by the modern mind, it is a total travesty, so strange and extreme as to make any handling of our problem impossible” (1992: 55-56). Some of the misunderstandings are more clearly outlined in the following paragraph:

The problem situation faced by modern thought in general, and anthropology in particular, is deeply unsymmetrical and un-relativistic. Relativism assumes or postulates a symmetrical world. Culture A has its own vision of itself and of culture B, and, likewise, B has its own vision of itself and of A. The same goes for an entire range of cultures. A must not sit in judgement on B nor vice versa, nor must B see A in terms of itself. Each must learn to see the other in terms of the other's own notions (if at all), and this is, presumably, the task and achievement of the hermeneutic anthropologist, as he himself envisages it. He is to be a neutral translator, at most. That is the picture presented by relativism.

(1992: 56)

This, of course is *not* the picture presented by relativism — although there may be people that claim to be “relativist” or postmodern and support this

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<sup>85</sup> In this section of his book, Gellner actually reacts to Geertz's lecture on “Anti-anti-relativism” (Geertz 1984).

picture as well. The image of cultures viewing each other in a totally *symmetrical* way is oversimplified and very much blown out of proportion. The question of the possibility of translating adequately one culture (or categories from one culture) into another is quite open. Personally, I think that the precise cultural facts of a specific culture can only be translated into the medium of expression of another culture under very special (limited and very much context-dependent) circumstances.<sup>86</sup> The question of the very possibility of any *neutral* translation is even logically inconsistent with the methodological claims associated with postmodernism (if it is a translation, it *cannot* be neutral!). The picture that Gellner offers is a grossly exaggerated caricature; extreme cases taken out of context and paraded in order to fulfill a specific agenda.<sup>87</sup> Relativism takes into account the simple fact that there *are* different cultures, different ways of understanding the world, and different ways of conceptualizing it. In anthropology, this is not at all new — one should only remember Evans-Pritchard's famous comment on the usefulness of organizing his daily affairs based on the Azande oracles!<sup>88</sup> Relativism *does not* postulate a symmetrical world — but Western rationalism and logical positivism (which, through the common sense, still lives!) do. For that kind of symmetry (rational, objective, logical in the first place), the antagonisms and doubts associated with postmodernisms present a potential danger, so

Postmodernism is a movement which, in addition to contingent flaws — obscurity, pretentiousness, faddiness, showmanship, cultural name-dropping — commits major errors in the method it recommends: its penchant for relativism and preferential attention to semantic idiosyncrasy blind it to the non-semantic aspect of society, and to the immensely important, absolutely pervasive

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. the wonderful example of the first contact used in Strathern 1987*b*.

<sup>87</sup> Feyerabend (1987) presents a brilliant critique of anti-relativist approaches that takes into account these facts.

<sup>88</sup> Again, this is one of Feyerabend's favorite anthropological examples.

asymmetry in cognitive and economic power in the world situation.

(Gellner 1992: 70)

Finally, Gellner concludes, postmodernism does not matter as such (being “a tortuous, somewhat affected fad, practised by at most some academics living fairly sheltered lives” [p. 72]), but relativism does, not because it threatens with the moral nihilism, but because it brings the potential disaster of cognitive relativism. But cognitive realism is already part of our (both Gellner’s and my) world — the Western discourses are not as all pervasive and as triumphant as it seemed perhaps even a few years ago (one of the great misinterpretations of Fukuyama’s present and popular concept of “the end of history”). I think that Gellner confused the aspects of market economy and consumerism (which do tend to spread throughout the Third World without many obstacles) with ideological and cultural aspects — for example, drinking Coca-Cola does not necessarily imply a full support for the American foreign politics and American cultural values, even though Coca-Cola is an American product. *It is possible to buy and enjoy some products of Western industry without actually being swept away by Western sets of values.* This possibility seems to evade Gellner’s critical account.

Gellner’s book, while offering some interesting and important criticism (do some postmodern authors claim that they have access to *objective* knowledge?; if they do not believe in the possible interpretation of written texts, why do they write?), offers no way out, no explanation, no solution to any of the conflicts that characterize the contemporary world. It is a step backwards, before authors like Evans-Pritchard and Malinowski, a step towards postulating Western rationalism as *the way* of understanding and conceptualizing our world. By pointing to the paradoxality of certain situations, postmodern anthropologists do not claim that there are no valid questions that can be asked. Gellner’s account

simply rejects a healthy scepticism and open-mindedness that can only help us to confront the problems of the contemporary world. It postulates the existence of the Universal Anthropological Nature, of goals and aims (associated with the Western sets of values) that are deemed to be prevalent *in the whole world*, and therefore have to be respected as such. In this way, it represents an attempt to establish another dominant narrative (or metanarrative) which will guide and instruct the generations to come. But the time where new generations were simply accepting grand narratives — without questioning their foundations or agendas — is gone. And so is the “right time” for establishing such a meta-narrative. It is a lament for a time long gone, time passed and lost with all the claims and pretensions to universality. By pointing at some of the dangers that this situation (“the Postmodern condition,” as Lyotard would say) brings, Gellner hopes both to advise and to warn at the same time. But his audience (as well as its values, wishes, and concerns) is for the most part already incorporated into the world which he refuses to accept.<sup>89</sup> The concepts and the ideas from his version of *la Lumières* were already attacked, criticized and theoretically demolished, not by “the latest fashionable scribes of the Left Bank,” but by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer<sup>90</sup> in their *Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, written in Germany in 1944.<sup>91</sup> So much for the battle cry warning of *Relativismus über Alles* on page 40 of Gellner’s book.

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<sup>89</sup> Paradoxically, even discourses of some most prominent critics of postmodernism are actually incorporated into the currents of postmodernism. This is especially the case for Habermas and Jameson (who actually wrote a Foreword for the English edition of Lyotard’s book), but also for at least several prominent anthropologists (Scholte, Fardon, Hobart).

<sup>90</sup> The Left Bank of the Rhine, perhaps?

<sup>91</sup> One would also expect that Gellner would direct his anti-relativistic criticism primarily against scientists like Mach, Minkowski, Einstein, Schrödinger, Heisenberg, etc. — who were there long before Geertz.

## POSTMODERNISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY: “IT’S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT”

Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald’s food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and ‘retro’ clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games.

(Lyotard 1993: 42)

The full title of the song of the American rock group REM referred to in the title of this section is actually: “It’s the end of the world as we know it (and I feel fine).” The question of the “I,” the motives, wishes, feelings, etc., of the individual subject come into focus. To be even more subjective, and following the theme of eclecticism, — while I am typing this, I am wearing hiking shoes made in Rumunia, a Swiss-made wristwatch (Swatch), Italian-made glasses, two “friendship bands” woven by Amerindians from Guatemala and Brazil, while different pieces of my clothes were made in Great Britain, Yugoslavia, USA, and Sweden. The globalness of the present world has become a fact of life, as noted in the famous quotation from Lyotard’s “Answering the question: What is postmodernism?” We do not even notice these things as something extraordinary or unusual, even though (at least in theory), we do communicate through the way we are dressed at least as much as through language or other means of expression.

Both the notion of the “I-ness” and the notion of the globalness (and continuing globalization) have come into the focus of contemporary research. It is in this somewhat paradoxical area where I believe that anthropology and postmodernism can communicate most profitably. I use the word with specifically economics-based connotations intentionally; since another important

aspect of our world seems to be the imposition of commodities-based strategies.<sup>92</sup> The aim of contemporary anthropology (the aim regarding postmodernism, of course) is to consume postmodernism, to reduce it to a set of meanings and phrases within the anthropological canon and prescribed discourse (so that it can be easily presented in lectures; so that elegant and unambiguous exam questions can be made out of it, neat textbooks written about it, etc.). If they (the "Postmodern anthropologists") think that nothing can be said with any significant degree of certainty, ask critics like Gellner, Spencer or Fardon, why do they bother to write and publish? (Some of "them" indeed write and publish a lot.) Is it really the money (salaries and research grants) that makes the (anthropological, academic, etc.) world go 'round? Or is there something else?<sup>93</sup> The answers to these questions again depend on the side of the Great Postmodernist Divide that one puts oneself.

One way of answering the question of the role of anthropology in the contemporary world has to do with the legacy of the colonial discourses that are still present. In fact, as Derrida (1992:7) very playfully (and somewhat disrespectfully for etymologies) remarks: "The Latin words *culture* and *colonialization* have a common root, there where it is precisely a question of what happens to roots."

Anthropologists are engaged in some form of a post-colonial discourse whenever they step (professionally, of course) into the world of a "strange" or

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<sup>92</sup> For the commodities-based strategies in the contemporary world and its influence on the way that we try to rationalize the world, I refer to Baudrillard (1987, 1988b, 1990, 1992, 1995).

<sup>93</sup> And, while I am typing this, I am reminded of the most eloquent 1918 lecture by Max Weber, "Science as a vocation." Some problems and dilemmas seem to be exactly the same. To quote from Weber: "The American's conception of the teacher who faces him is: he sells me his knowledge and his methods for my father's money, just as the greengrocer sells my mother cabbage. And that is all" (1946: 149). Of course, although Weber used an American example in his lecture (to contrast American and German attitudes towards learning), the situation is much more widespread today. Almost universal, I would think.



“exotic” culture (the fact that it might be their own culture does not affect this). “Step into” might not be the correct expression, since one of the most important conditions for the understanding of another culture (and the whole different set of values, norms, representations, etc.) is being aware of the differences. Except in the cases where the anthropologist/ethnographer is himself/herself a member of a certain community (and sometimes even in those cases, but on a different plane), there is a fundamental difference. Two worlds meet. Or, alternatively, two (or more) cultures, worlds (sometimes literally centuries) apart.<sup>94</sup> This “stepping into” should not be taken only in a literal sense, since it presupposes any form of communication about or with a culture or a society (or group, individual, etc.) that is being studied. Another thing that it presupposes is that there will be elements which the anthropologist will find impossible to classify or explain (cf. Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 1991), so he/she should not try to force her/his preconceptions on the culture, but to accept the potential unintelligibility of certain elements of the studied culture as a fact, culture as a specific set of values for each individual and distinctive community or group.

Of course, the question arises of the objective (if there is such thing) validity of doing any research. It was as far as in 1881, when one of the founding fathers of anthropology, Adolf Bastian, remarked that

For us, primitive societies (*Naturvölker*) are ephemeral, that is, as regards our knowledge of, and our relations with them, in fact, inasmuch as they exist for us at all. At the very instance they become known to us they are doomed.

(quoted in Fabian 1991: 194)

The image of other worlds is constantly being distorted and remodeled, based on Western media assumptions, and it is mostly presented through the

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<sup>94</sup> Of course, there are *differences within specific cultures as well as differences between anthropologists/ethnographers and cultures they come from* — I am just using these universal concepts here to illustrate my point.

Western media. In the globalized world, these distorted images then sift back even to the ones that they are (were) supposed to represent (for examples related to misrepresentations of Islam, see Ahmed 1992).<sup>95</sup>

In a sense, women are the ultimate “others.” They are an integral part of the world and at the same time have been throughout history excluded (partially or completely) from full participation in it (Riley 1988). Observed and studied in “primitive” societies, they have only recently become active participants in “mainstream” sciences and humanities, adding a specific (or should I say: gender specific) point of view. This opens numerous possibilities, as summed up by Toni Flores:

What is interesting, I think, is that because male culture is officially the valued and powerful one, women come with some determination to grasp what we have been denied — and from this realization come the various women’s movements. On the other hand, because female culture, along with the feminine possibilities it carries, is both devalued and disempowered, it is hard for men to recognize or accept that they lack something, much less attempt actively to grasp what they hardly know they want.

(Flores 1991: 143)

Of course, I would not agree with phrases such as “male culture” or “female culture” — they both seem to be too general and too universalizing and totalizing, trying to subsume a great variety of different discourses under a common denominator. However, based on my observations and interviews in Macedonia and Slovenia, as well as on the relevant literature, it seem to me that in everyday life there exists a sense of polarity and ambivalence when it comes to the issues dealing with gender. Anthropology is no exception to this (Quinn

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<sup>95</sup> Another excellent example of how one great world tradition and culture, China, has been misrepresented and its image distorted beyond recognition (caricaturized, even satirized, in the writings that had most serious objectives) even in critical Western scholarship, and even by authors like Foucault (and probably also Derrida), is given in Longxi 1988.

1977). The picture has been distorted, people realize that and begin to wander what the "real" image look like.

The extent to which anthropology can (or even should) reshape this distorted picture remains unclear, but anthropology as something standing outside the contemporary world, in the realm of the "pure" science is a fiction.<sup>96</sup> It is my belief that anthropologists have a duty and an obligation (both as human beings and as critical intellectuals) to at least try to present "the others" in an acceptable way (acceptable for the others in the first place!). Since they depend on their existence (that is to say, the very existence of others is a prerequisite for their profession), it is in their (existential) interest to assure that the others are represented in an acceptable way and that the "natives" are able both to represent and to express themselves in a ways that they find most appropriate.<sup>97</sup> Whether one will call this expression representation (Fabian 1990), evocation (Tyler 1986), invocation, or something else (cf. Marcus and Clifford 1985; Geertz 1983 and 1988; Marcus 1989; Strathern 1987*a*, 1987*b*, 1991; Haraway 1991), depends on the context-specific cultural frame where the interaction is taking place. It also depends on whether one *believes* that any kind of representation/evocation/invocation/etc. is possible when one operates with different (culture-specific, context-bound, experience-influenced, etc.) sets of categories.

I do not intend to fully adopt here Asad's (1979) thesis that what really matters in terms of social change today is the movement of world capital and the globalization of world economic processes (although I do believe that terms like "market economy" are nonsense invented by the people in power in order to

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<sup>96</sup> At least as much as the very concept that any science can be "pure," "objective," "disinterested," or politically "neutral."

<sup>97</sup> Of course, the question then arises (and I do not claim to know the answer to it): who decides what is an adequate representation of the other in a specific context and based on what criteria?

retain and globalize this power<sup>98</sup>), but this thesis reflects a part of the problem. (On another note, as will be clearer in the chapter on Macedonia, economic power is quite important in gender relations: the more one has, the less likely that she will be marginalized.) If anthropology is to incorporate such a thesis, then anthropologists should be actively involved in the processes of social change. The experience of the reality "lived" can be more helpful than the experience of the reality "theorized." However, as academics, they usually claim (publicly, at least) no allegiance to a particular political system or ideology. As scientists, they are supposed to be "neutral." Again, the idea that "neutrality" in a great post-romantic sense is simply impossible in any science (including anthropology) is nothing new or original. While most authors will claim that their interpretation of the data (and their field notes) are reasonably (if not absolutely) "objective," they are well aware that others are not quite that "neutral" or "objective." Anthropologists need others (cf. Fabian 1990; Mason 1990, 1995), both in ethnography and in theory,<sup>99</sup> even when others are actually their fellow anthropologists (cf. Clifford 1988; Rapport 1994).

An interesting situation also occurs when feminist authors (as "others") write on women (as "others" as well): are they "feminist" or radical enough (cf. Moore 1994b)? Where does feminism end and "pure" or "disengaged" research start? Is it possible to be a feminist and do this kind of research on feminist discourses or practices? Since others are "there" (and we are "here") — and there is no way to find out whether they have always been, or were just constructed by ourselves — then, the main question for me is how to approach this fact. What to do with the others?

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<sup>98</sup> To claim that any Third World country can just step into the "world economy" and there successfully compete with developed countries (much of whose development and stability was achieved at the expense of the Third World) is simply perverse.

<sup>99</sup> For the discussion of otherness that is very relevant for my research, cf. Herzfeld 1987: 13-16.

The answer is not as obvious as it seems. Obviously, one does not ignore others, although it is relatively easy to pretend that they do not exist (since this is only pretending, one is still aware of them and just makes a conscious effort to avoid them). But this attempt at avoiding does not deny their existence! Even if we bypass *something*, we implicitly acknowledge the fact that there is *something* out there (to be avoided). Others can be studied, but then the question might arise from whose perspective and why. What gives the right (any right) to anthropologists to go around and study various ethnic groups, and then subsequently publish the most intimate details of their lives? From another perspective, the dependence of anthropologists on their "informants" (the word has a slightly Orwellian sound for me) is almost complete, and very rarely do anthropologists question the data that they have obtained in the field. Very rarely they assume that they might have been told something simply because the "natives" wanted to please them or to avoid probing into the more intimate aspects of their lives.<sup>100</sup> Questions relating to the privacy and the actual wishes of the Others (the "observed ones") are increasingly becoming paramount in any serious research project. Although the situation seems to be most tricky with regard to the field work (positioning of oneself with his/her "objects of study," questions regarding even ethics of disclosure of certain details, anthropologists' personal life "in the field," etc.), it is even worse when one actually studies texts. The holy scriptures of anthropology reveal more about their authors than about the actual people(s) studied (cf. Geertz 1988; Rapport 1994). The writings are irreparably tainted by the assumed objectivity of the "facts," and in most cases, the only author of these "facts" is an anthropologist himself or herself. In the world of the academic discipline where questions multiply and dilemmas abound,

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<sup>100</sup> Several years ago, a delegation from a South Pacific ethnic group came for a farewell visit to an anthropologist who did his field work there and was getting ready to leave with his wife. The delegation expressed their gratitude for the anthropologist's stay in their village, because that presented them with an opportunity to observe the life of a white family! Participant observation at its best.

one can opt for a way out by acknowledging that anthropology as an academic discipline (the way it was conceived in the 19th and early 20th century) is simply impossible. The study of man? The study of culture? The study of social change and the related processes? Or all of the above, or something else?

Of course, admitting that I am engaged in something that is impossible places me in a somewhat precarious position; I would be something like a double-agent working from the inside on the destruction of something which would also bring my own destruction (at least where most of my work and possible career is concerned).

There is another way of looking at this, the way outlined in 1973 by Clifford Geertz, who espoused the "semiotic concept of culture," taking as a starting point a view that anthropology (as "the analysis of culture") should be "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (1973: 5). Anthropology can be attempted as a quest for meanings, hidden, distorted, forgotten, or simply deconstructed.

This is where the "post-structuralist," "postmodern," "literary," or "text-centered" approaches comes into play. These approaches (Fabian 1990, 1991 outlines them as a single approach — which I find a bit too simplistic) are potentially limited by the fact that (apart from some sharp disagreements on the approaches themselves) studying culture as a text (or a set of texts) brings a potential danger of reducing anthropology to ethnography (in the original ancient Greek sense of the word, meaning simply *written description* of other cultures) and literary criticism, and practically excluding the fieldwork. For when one can finish his/her work without ever going to the strange and exotic places where "the others" dwell, why do it at all? (Except, of course, in the cases of people that are naturally inclined towards travelling.)

Of course, the relationship between these approaches and the study of gender is in no way simple or straightforward, as noted by Marilyn Strathern:



[T]he constant rediscovery that women are the Other in men's accounts reminds women that they must see men as the Other in relation to themselves. Creating a space for women becomes creating a space for the self, an experience becomes an instrument for knowing the self. Necessary to the construction of the feminist self, then, is a nonfeminist Other. The Other is most generally conceived as "patriarchy," the institutions and persons who represent male domination, often simply concretized as "men." [Cf. Toni Flores, above.] Because the goal is to restore to subjectivity a self dominated by the Other, there can be no shared experience with persons who stand for the Other.

(Strathern 1987a: 288)

However, the questions relating to otherness and identity lead to the ones on difference(s). The other is recognized as other because <sup>it</sup> is different.<sup>101</sup> But the others are also different among themselves — and this is a particular aspect of postmodern approaches where feminism can offer its insights for contemporary anthropology. Several most prominent feminist authors in disciplines ranging from philosophy (Bigwood 1991; Flax 1990) and cultural criticism (Butler 1990, 1993; De Lauretis 1994) to anthropology (Haraway 1991; Moore 1994a, 1994b) and sociology (McRobbie 1994) have given the concept of difference(s) a very prominent place in their recent work. The notions of multiplicity and heterogeneity that come along with the one of difference(s) are most obvious signs of the recognition of postmodern approaches in contemporary anthropology.

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<sup>101</sup> However, see Baudrillard 1996 for the critique of this perception of Otherness. I refer to his arguments in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

## POSTMODERNISM AND COMMON SENSE: BEYOND THE LOOKING GLASS

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where—" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"— so long as I get *somewhere*," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

(Carroll 1992a: 55)

The conversation that Alice has with the Cheshire Cat outlines some of the most important dilemmas facing contemporary social sciences (including anthropology) and humanities.<sup>102</sup> As far as the *method* is concerned, the advice that the Cheshire Cat offers seems quite reasonable: if one only goes (works, studies, researches, writes, etc.) long enough, one is bound to get *somewhere* (and find some audience, appropriate management, office, research, or teaching job, publisher, etc.). But how long is long enough? Should we just aim (as Max Planck once suggested) to *outlive* our theoretical opponents, and in that way prove that we were (are) right and they were (are) wrong?

Contemporary social theory is increasingly finding itself in a situation similar to the one Alice finds herself when she steps through the looking glass. Things seem to be inverted, "the order of things" (to borrow the famous Foucault's phrase and the title of his book) seems to be totally inverted, and if one tries to look at things in the way that she/he is used to (by virtue of "classical

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<sup>102</sup> And probably even natural sciences, as exemplified by the recent discussions in physics and mathematics related to "fractal" theories. (As a matter of fact, Strathern 1991 uses "fractal" illustrations.)

educational approaches,” or something on similar lines), things do not make too much sense.

The Looking-Glass world which the brave and sensible Alice enters, refusing to be caught up in her own reflection on the mantelpiece, is not a place of symmetrical reversal, or anti-matter, or a mirror-image inversion of the one she comes from. It is the world of discourse and asymmetry, whose arbitrary rules work to displace the subject, Alice, from any possibility of naturalistic identification. Although in the transit Alice is divested of many a smug, self-righteous certainty, still she keeps on asking questions and sensibly wanting to know, who “dreamed it all?”

(De Lauretis 1984: 2)

The flourishing of postmodern theory in practically all areas of contemporary culture makes it difficult to avoid the paradoxicality of certain questions<sup>103</sup> — not the least being the fact that even the critics of postmodernism must enter the postmodern discourse (and use some of the specifically postmodernist discourse-strategies) if they want to make their point. As put forth by Donna Haraway (1985: 69; also referred to by Strathern 1991: 38), postmodernism is not really an option, not something that someone can actually be for or against, it is a whole set of meanings that is already deeply embedded in the contemporary world. We do live in the postmodern world, whether we like it or not. We did not choose it or make it, but we might be able to alter it in accordance with our (shared? common? mutual?) needs, systems of values, and situation assessments. These are all not only power-based, but also to a large extent gender-based (cf. Flax 1987; Del Valle 1993), and so one gets to the problems associated with the various currents of contemporary feminist theory.

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<sup>103</sup> “Who dreamed it all?” being just one of them.

I have just referred to several important authors associated with feminist theory. The relationship between feminism<sup>104</sup> and postmodernism (cf. Gordon 1993; Flax 1987: 624-625; Grant 1993; Elam 1994) is interesting because, among other things, some of the concerns present in contemporary feminist theory (representation of the other in terms of gender and its relatedness to the questions of power and different language games in the first place) are also present in various aspects of postmodernism. In fact, some feminist authors claim that these concerns were present in the currents of feminist theory long before they were "rediscovered" by the postmodern theorists, especially in anthropology.

The feminist position does not merely parallel the anthropologist's belated postmodern stance; the endeavours are connected to one another. They belong to coeval Western historical-cultural milieux, and if they have been slow in making cross-references to each other (cf. Strathern 1987*a*), nonetheless they derive inspiration from similar sources.

(Strathern 1991: 34)

The whole idea of the partial nature of any (scientific, humanistic, or any other) project or enterprise, the gender-relatedness (frequently ignored in the past generations of scholars) of (not just ethnographic) narratives, the need of inclusion of the other voices in any dialogue, all of this has been accutely present in different aspects of feminist theory (cf. Strathern 1988: 8). To quote again from Strathern:

Feminist debate is characterized by a compatibility that does not require comparability between the persons who engage in it, bar

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<sup>104</sup> Following Baber, I take as my working definition (Western) feminism as: "the doctrine that, insofar as possible, societies should be organized in such a way that men and women have the same opportunities at the same costs. This does not mean merely that the same options should be available to men and women but that the odds of achieving the same results should be equal for men and women in the aggregate and that no individuals should have to pay more heavily than others for exercising their options in virtue of their gender" (1993: 47).

their engaging in it. Whether in terms of internal *or* external differences, persons travel between different positions. It is almost as though the disproportion were deliberate. Feminist scholarship is not a discipline isomorphic with other disciplines — it simply invades and draws on them. Thus I cannot substitute feminism for anthropology or vice versa, listen to one and forget the other. At the same time, each constitutes a position from which to regard a counter position.

(1991: 35, reference omitted)

Of course, as pointed out by Strathern, even with this disjunction between feminism and anthropology, these are not two separate realms, she cannot divide herself into the “anthropological” and the “feminist” half; different sides coexist, and one can really perceive Marilyn Strathern (a quite specific, distinctive person, as well as a brilliant scholar, one might say) only as a combination of the two. In Donna Haraway’s words: a cyborg.<sup>105</sup>

According to Haraway (1985, 1991), in the ongoing complexities of the present world, only a cyborg would stand a chance to survive. The problem with cyborgs is that they are actually *created* (by an *external* force), they can *regenerate* themselves, but they are incapable of *reproducing* themselves.<sup>106</sup> Is this the adequate price that one has to pay in order to survive? And is the paradoxical position of an individual in the contemporary world somewhat resembling of a situation where women find themselves, both integrated in the worlds they inhabit and outside of them at the same time?<sup>107</sup> They are supposed to be both providers and nurturers (<sup>the</sup>famous — although ridiculous — structuralist dichotomy of “nature” versus “culture” and women’s roles in all that comes to

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<sup>105</sup> On the concept of cyborg, cf. also Rapport 1991.

<sup>106</sup> On some of the questions opened by the development of the new reproductive strategies, cf. Strathern 1992.

<sup>107</sup> For example, “glass ceilings” so typical for the Anglo-American cultures — where a woman can be promoted only to certain level in the business/power/prestige hierarchy.

mind), but also metaphors (the girl in Eco's *The Name of the Rose*), symbols (like Italo Calvino's Zobeide, "a city built from a dream of woman" [De Lauretis 1984: 12 ff]), as well as respected partners and companions, the other for men as much as for women from different worlds and systems of values, etc. The passage from the Introduction of de Lauretis' book<sup>108</sup> is worth quoting, since she nicely summarizes the situation where contemporary feminists find themselves, compared to the paradoxical world where Alice (hardly a feminist text in any sense, as pointed out by De Lauretis!) finds herself:

Far from proposing this Alice (or any other) as yet another "image" of woman as the symbol of a struggle too real and too diversified to be even minimally "represented" in a single text, character, or person, I like to think of her tale as a parable suggesting — merely suggesting — the situation, the predicament, and the adventure of critical feminism. Like Alice with her ball of worsted, an unheroic Ariadne's thread which the kitten keeps unravelling, feminism has dared the labyrinth of language, has dreamed and been dreamed by the Red King, has met its Humpty Dumpty and its benevolent White Knight. We too have been told that we are all alike and should "have left off at seven"; we too have been polite, as we were taught, and have paid compliments and tried to make conversation only to be told we "have no more sense than a baby"; we too have been puzzled to see our simplest questions taken as riddles, and acquiesced to the answers given, "not wishing to begin an argument."

(1984: 2, footnote omitted)

Can a cyborg overcome such a situation? (From another perspective: should it? How much can or should be sacrificed for mere survival? Does

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<sup>108</sup> Although primarily concerned with the semiotics of cinema, this book is very interesting because it points at different ways in which one can (from a feminist perspective) look at the whole concept of the "language game" with all its implications. Another very interesting feminist reading of the same topic is provided in an essay by Andrea Nye (1987) on Kristeva's critique of Derrida and the potential place where women critical intellectuals can find themselves.



anyone really care?) The notion of the cyborg implies blending and mixing together of (at least) two totally different worlds, the world of machines (technology), and the world of the human body (life). Introducing life into technology or technology into life becomes the only option for adequate survival in the world of the changing and constantly shifting boundaries. As Marilyn Strathern writes:

In place of <sup>a</sup>traveller whose composite experience integrates a miscellany of events and locations, I have substituted a cyborg. The anthropologist's writings form a kind of integrated circuit between parts that work as extensions of another. As a field of extensions, the cyborg moves without travelling, as one might imagine the effect of jumping in one's thoughts from one [Papuan] Highlands society to another, or from one aspect of social life to another. The circuit still seems centred, however, on the perceptual tools of the anthropologist.

(Strathern 1991: 55)

The problem is that there are numerous ways in dealing with the Looking Glass through which one looks. That the world in 1996 is different from the ones of any previous (or future) epoch is a tautology. That within this "1996" world there are actually numerous interrelated and parallel worlds (something resembling the "theory of strings" in contemporary theoretical physics and astronomy) — which *do not* necessarily get in contact with any or all of the other worlds — is somewhat less obvious, but still important enough to be recognized if one is going to make an attempt at understanding the other. This attempt at understanding is as far as one is really capable of going: producing more texts, more narratives, engaging in various discourses, opening new gaps (for the extent of one's knowledge just opens more and more questions, just like the child constantly asks "Why?") to be filled by provisional and *partial* (Strathern 1991) answers.

Partiality (in all senses of the word) is the primary notion one has to deal with today, in the world of 1996. It is the concept that eludes and evades, but a concept that is an essential aspect of the Postmodern world. There is not one, but numerous postmodernisms, and there is simply no way in which they can be all “grouped” or “subsumed” together. The problem with postmodernisms (and part of the reason why they cause headaches for some people and misunderstandings for some others) is that they mean different things for different people, and anyone using the (“POST”) word believes that it means exactly what she/he wants it to mean “— neither more nor less.” And the only real question that remains is: “which is to be master — that’s all.”

The image in the Looking Glass depends not only on who is looking at it, but also (and maybe even more) on who is actually holding the mirror. Unless, of course, one decides to step through it.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POINTS OF DEPARTURE: DEFINING GENDER

If we resign ourselves to keeping words like “feminine” and “masculine” it is because there is an anchoring point somewhere in a far distant reality. But I believe we must do our utmost to reduce this heritage. Let us try as quickly as possible to abandon these binary distinctions which never make any sense.

(Cixous 1994: 135)

The first mention of the English word “gender” almost invariably suggests a connection with language. In fact, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (fifteenth edition) defines gender as

a phenomenon in which the words of a certain part of speech (...) require the agreement, or concord through grammatical marking (or inflection), of various other words related to them in a sentence. In languages that exhibit gender, two or more classes of nouns control variation in words of other parts of speech (typically pronouns and adjectives and sometimes verbs). These other words maintain constant meaning but vary in form according to the class of the word that controls them in a given situation.

(Vol. 5: 172)

According to the OED,

In the Indo-European languages, there were originally three genders, the masculine and the feminine, to which respectively belonged the great majority of nouns denoting male and female persons and animals; and the neuter, including chiefly nouns denoting things without sex. But great numbers of words denoting inanimate objects were of the masculine or feminine gender, without even any figurative attribution of sex; and in some cases the names of objects possessing sex were of the neuter gender. In Semitic, and in the Romanic languages, there are only two genders, masculine and feminine [while in Slavic languages and in

German there are three]. In many languages, the adjectives, and in some languages, the verbs, have inflection depending on the gender of the sbs. to which they syntactically refer. Modern English has 'natural' as opposed to 'grammatical' gender; i.e., nouns are masculine, feminine or neuter according as the objects they denote are male, female, or neither sex; and the gender of a noun has no other syntactical effect than that of determining the pronoun that must be used in referring to it.

(Vol. 6: 427)

Etymologically, gender, just like *genre* in French, *genero* in Spanish and Portuguese, *genere* in Italian and Latin *gener*, stem from Latin *genus* (**race, kind**), which in turn comes from the ancient Greek *γενος* and Sanskrit *jānas*. They, in turn, are derived from the Old Aryan \**genes-*, most closely related to the root *gen* (**to produce or to give birth**; hence the meaning also includes **kin**<sup>109</sup>).

This brief etymological excursion points to the multiplicities of meanings that made their ways into gender studies as well — primarily through the distinction between sex (as a biological fact) and gender (as something that is primarily constructed *within* and *by* the culture and society).<sup>110</sup> Although this

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<sup>109</sup> For example, the Serbian and Croatian word for gender, *rod*, primarily denotes **kin**. However, it is also connected with the concept of procreation. For example, while gender is *rod*, relatives are *rodjaci* or *rodbina*, and to give birth is *roditi*. Similar etymologies derived from the word *rod* exist in Macedonian, where relatives are *rodnina*.

<sup>110</sup> Inasmuch as one can talk of any "facts," of course. The word gender has been used to refer to sex (OED), although one can also talk about the "gender identity." This concept was used for the first time in 1963 by the American psychoanalyst Robert Stoller in his discussion of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) Gender Identity Research Project, established in 1958. "He formulated the concept of gender identity within the framework of the biology/culture distinction, such that sex was related to biology (hormones, genes, nervous system, morphology) and gender was related to culture (psychology, sociology)" (Haraway 1991: 133). According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, this primarily involves distinction on the lines male/female, self-conception of the individual, as distinguished from the actual biological sex. (Of course, this self-conception can also involve hermaphrodites — as a genuine "third sex" —, as well as transsexuals, homosexuals, etc. The distinction between heterosexual and homosexual orientation develops later in life, well after the

distinction has long been taken for granted (and, starting with Sherry Ortner's critique, used in different structuralist or neo-structuralist models<sup>111</sup>), the time has come to reexamine and reevaluate it, as recently shown by Collier and Yanagisako (1987) as well as Henrietta Moore (1994b: 12 ff).<sup>112</sup>

Etymologically, gender and sex have been equated (cf. the examples in OED, Vol. 6: 428), but in anthropology, it seemed a reasonably good idea to keep them apart.<sup>113</sup> This created a series of problems and questions that led to other questions, not answers (Where does "sex" end and "gender" begins? What is the boundary between the two? How and why one becomes aware of this boundary?, etc.). Part of the problem was an insistence on what Moore (1993, 1994b: 33; following Collier and Yanagisako 1987) calls "western folk models" about gender — since certain dichotomies seemed to be represented in Western cultures from which anthropologists came, they simply generalized these dichotomies and tried to establish them (without much success, as it turned out) in non-Western societies as well. Research conducted in Papua New Guinea and Melanesia, for

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establishment of a basic gender identity.) "Gender identity is not fixed at birth; both physiological and social factors contribute to the early establishment of a core identity, which is modified and expanded by social factors as the child matures (5: 172)." The basic gender identity is usually established by the age of three (*Britannica*; cf. also Ounsted and Taylor 1972; Abbot and Wallace 1991). Findlay 1995 convincingly argues that even *biological sex is socially constructed*.

<sup>111</sup> For the criticism of approaches based on binary oppositions, see, for example, Stolcke 1993.

<sup>112</sup> Also cf. Haraway 1991: 134-135. Actually, the German word *Geschlecht* combines the meanings of the English *sex* and *gender*.

<sup>113</sup> This is a prevailing view within the last decade. In 1987, Pat Caplan wrote:

However, (...) a distinction between sex, in the physiological sense, and gender, which is a cultural construct, a set of learned behaviour patterns, has been proposed and is now widely used. Much work over the last two decades, particularly by feminist scholars, has examined the relationship between sex in this sense, and gender (Caplan 1987: 1).

example,<sup>114</sup> points to ways of distinguishing “male” and “female” in ways totally unrelated to anything that these “western folk models” might have prepared us for. Here, gender categories are not seen or experienced as something fixed and bound to overt biological or cultural differences — they are something in states of flux and instability, more seen as substances that freely flow towards each other, occasionally mixing and then separating again. Similarly, different concepts of “gender identity” and “gender difference” can run parallel to each other, then converge, then separate again in completely unpredictable ways. For scholars like Judith Butler (1990, 1993), the sex/gender distinction is simply irrelevant.

Today, there is no way of clearly distinguishing where biological influences stop and where “the culture” starts its work on the shaping of gender. In one of her suggestions for the study of gender, Judith Grant (in her first hypothesis) wrote that, generally speaking,

Gender is a relatively autonomous, hegemonic, ideological structure that divides the world hierarchically into two mythical [sic!] genders,<sup>115</sup> and which reinforces itself through an elaborate system of rules and punishments enforced in all aspects of life.  
(1993: 161)

This, of course, is much more a working hypothesis than an attempt at a proper definition. In fact, in light of all the current controversies that surround debates about gender (cf. Haraway 1991; Mathieu 1991*a*, 1991*b*; Grant 1993; Angerer 1994), one is tempted to question the purpose of seeking a fixed

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. Gelber 1986; Caplan 1987; Strathern 1988; also the examples referred to by Moore 1994*b*: 23-25.

<sup>115</sup> Of course, one should bear in mind that this is only one of the working hypotheses that Grant introduces in her book — Grant herself questions the division into two genders. [I have some reservations towards the use of the word “myth” and the adjectives derived from it in a negative sense. It does not do justice to the variety of interpretations and meanings that the concept of myth opens.]



definition of it. With all the fluctuations and instability that different gender categories present, is it possible to give a definition at all?

Therefore, the most useful approach (in the context of my present work) seems to me the one which discusses not what the meaning of (the concept, the word, the idea, etc.) gender *is*, but *how* this concept, word, idea is used in contemporary cultures and contemporary discourses. So, instead of properly defining gender, I propose to set out some questions related to it:

1. How is gender constructed in contemporary anthropology?
2. What is the meaning of gender in specific cultures?<sup>116</sup>
3. How can these meanings inform research on gender in contemporary anthropology?

I will not proceed in the same order as these questions have been set up; I shall start with the second one, and look at some issues related to the gender construction first in Macedonia (Prespa) and then in Slovenia (Ljubljana). Then I shall proceed with the first one and the third one in the following chapters. I hope that this order will make the discussion easier, proceeding from ethnography to the more theoretical aspects. Of course, my aim is to present the ethnography of discourses on gender both in a more “classical” way (Macedonia and Slovenia), but also in a somewhat more “contemporary” way — writing in a sense an ethnography of contemporary anthropological theory.

This chapter began with the discussion of postmodernism and some of its aspects most closely related to contemporary anthropological theory — like interpretative, poststructuralist, “text-centered” or “literary” approaches. All these aspects rely to a great extent on relativism, which is the basis of postmodern approaches. Relativism, in turn, introduces the notion of difference(s) — including pluralism and heterogeneity — and it is this notion that connects it to

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<sup>116</sup> The question which can actually be subdivided into several other questions — all viewed within a specific cultural setting,— for example: What is a man? What is a woman? What are they for each other? What constitutes someone as woman or man? What differentiates women and men?, etc.

the contemporary studies of gender. It is also a concept which connects anthropology with feminism, since both rely on the study and investigation of difference(s). There can be no study of gender without the recognition of difference(s) — both between the genders and within them. Now I will proceed with the more specific exploration of the issues related to gender and difference(s) in two ethnographic areas.

# The other side of the window:

## Gender, equality, and difference in Prespa, Republic of Macedonia

"I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, sir," said Alice, "because  
I'm not myself, you see."

"I don't see," said the Caterpillar.

(Carroll 1992a: 37)





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**Map 1** The Republic of Macedonia. After Perry-Castañeda Library Internet page, Online.



## INTRODUCTION: CONSTRUCTING GENDER

In this chapter, I intend to outline ways in which concepts of gender (especially in an idealized sense: *what does it mean to be a man or what does it mean to be a woman?*) are constructed in Prespa, in the southwestern part of Macedonia. The term "Macedonia" refers to the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, a country which gained its independence from the SFR Yugoslavia in 1991. It has a territory of 25,713 square kilometers and approximately 1.937 million inhabitants.<sup>117</sup> As in many other aspects, some historical and geographical controversy surrounds this region as well, since Prespa is also a region divided between Macedonia, Greece and Albania. The Greek and Albanian parts are being referred to by the Macedonian population as "*Dolna Prespa*" ("Lower Prespa"). As far as I could tell when I went through the Greek Lower Prespa on several occasions in the 1980s,<sup>118</sup> the villages are still largely inhabited by the Slav Macedonian population. In a nice example of the construction of "Otherness," I was told that if I wanted to see the "true" or the "real" Macedonian customs and culture, I would actually have to go to the Slav Macedonian villages in the Albanian part. This was because, being hermetically sealed off by the "Iron Curtain" from 1945 until 1991, Slav Macedonians there kept all of their old rituals.<sup>119</sup>

However, the data in this chapter refer only to "Macedonian" (or "Upper") Prespa. Although I will also be using examples from Greece and a few other South European/Mediterranean areas, the focus of my research is on the territory of the

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<sup>117</sup> This is based on the 1994 census. Some Western analysts estimate the number to be just over 2.2 million (*CIA World Fact Book* for 1995).

<sup>118</sup> These were vacation trips with my parents to the Aegean in Greece.

<sup>119</sup> For example, an elderly woman told me: "The <sup>↓</sup>weddings today, they aren't like they used to be. If you want to see how it used to be done in the old days, you have to go to Albania." I have to note that, unlike other ethnic minorities in Albania between 1945 and 1991, Macedonians in Lower Prespa were allowed to go to primary schools in their own language (up to the age of 15).

Republic of Macedonia only, without any negative (cultural, territorial, etc.) implications that the use of this term might have (cf. Danforth 1993). The data are based on my observations and interviews conducted among the mostly Slavic Macedonian population (that is to say, whose first language is Macedonian) of Prespa (the municipality of Resen, population around 16,000) in the summers of 1993 and 1994, as well as on the published sources available. Wherever possible, I have used comparisons with recorded examples from neighboring regions, as well as from personal experiences — since through all my life I have spent on the average at least a couple of months per year in Resen. My examples from the rural communities are from the different villages around Resen, although the town itself (despite some recent developments) is still much more rural than urban — a view shared by a majority of the population.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, most people have land outside the town and working this land forms a very important addition to their income.

The extent to which “ideal” descriptions are merely sociocultural constructs will become obvious throughout this chapter. What makes this situation particularly interesting from the postmodern point of view is both the notion of “double reality” (or *hyperreality*, as I would prefer to call it) where both sides know that what is being presented as the “official story” has nothing to do with “reality.” At the same time, both sides play along with this.

At the 1994 Forum Against Ethnic Violence conference on Macedonia,<sup>121</sup> Teuta Arifi, the secretary of the Albanian League of Women used the analogy of the window to refer to the situation of Albanian women in Macedonia. In Albanian<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> To a large extent, Resen stands in what R. E. Pahl (1968) would describe as the “rural-urban continuum” — it is neither completely rural or urban, with its population freely exchanging rural and urban roles, complementing different ways of subsistence, and at the same time eclectically combining different sets of values.

<sup>121</sup> The conference was held on November 11 and 12 at the Embryology Theatre, University College London.

<sup>122</sup> In Prespa, the word “Albanian” can also be used to refer to the Slav Macedonians from Albania that come and take mostly unskilled and low-paid jobs (mostly in the construction business).



communities, it is normally the men who discuss important issues and make decisions in the main room of the house. Women do not have the access to these rooms, but only serve the men (coffee, biscuits, tea, etc.) through the small rectangular opening in the wall. Their "proper space" is the kitchen, washing area, or wherever the small children are. They are symbolically excluded from the decision-making and (supposedly) have no knowledge of the "important" debates that go on. Of course, as Arifi clearly demonstrated in her paper, this is not the case — even to the point that the women are able to sometimes "take the matter in their own hands" and break the deadlock that men frequently create (Arifi 1994). But this is still much more an exception than the rule; by and large, the role of women in Macedonia can be referred to as "someone from the other side of the window."

This is a situation fairly typical of the rural communities in Macedonia. Despite the fact that a significant number of people live in cities (more than one third of the country's population in the capital, Skopje), the connections (both on the family and on the broader economic level) with the rural areas are very strong. These connections go so far that the young people that were born, raised and live in foreign countries (like Germany or Sweden, for example) will still come to marry in the villages that they (or, more precisely, their families) are from.<sup>123</sup> The main sense of identity is the one that people get from their family. When people meet for the first time, they are often identified in relation to their parents or some other close

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<sup>123</sup> This is primarily the case with males. Girls that live abroad are given more choice. Although some form of family pressure exists in these matters, it seems that decisions to marry "at home" are influenced by a sense of responsibility for the creation of family. In this sense, and especially in the rural communities, males are still regarded as "heads of the family," so they try to make sure that the family will function smoothly. Stories about failed marriages between Macedonians and non-Macedonians (primarily those cases when a Macedonian man marries a foreign woman) are an important part of local folklore; at least one of these stories formed a basis of a TV documentary made 15 years ago, but recently (1994) re-broadcasted as one of the best documentaries made by the Macedonian TV.

relatives<sup>124</sup> (“son/daughter of so and so,” “nephew/niece of so and so,” “grandson/granddaughter of so and so,” etc.).<sup>125</sup> This influences and to an extent suppresses the notion of individuality, since a person is immediately aware of her or his family background, and family’s reputation very much influences anyone’s individual reputation. This becomes obvious in relation to the honor/shame code (cf. Campbell 1964; Bourdieu 1977; Archetti 1994<sup>126</sup>), when a bad thing that a single individual does can relate to (that is to say, ruin) the reputation of all the family members — including third and fourth cousins and so on. Being from a “good family” means primarily being from a family whose members live by this code, who do not have any “shame” attached to their name. “It’s a shame!” (“*Sramota!*”) is an exclamation that expresses both pity and disgust. Even little children are taught not to do certain things because “it’s a shame.”

Although in Prespa, just like in European Mediterranean societies, there are no specific rules about most favored or prescribed marriage partners, it can be said that “[t]he main principle governing marriage strategies are the maintenance of the family’s position in the local hierarchy<sup>127</sup> and avoidance of all practices that may

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<sup>124</sup> The concept of the close relative is somewhat different to the one that is present in the West. For example, not only immediate family, but also second and third cousins are considered to be close relatives. This notion of “close relatives” can sometimes be extended to people related five generations back. The Macedonian Orthodox Church prohibits marriages between people related nine generations back or less. Although this ruling does not have any legal sanction, in practice it seems to be strictly followed. Marriage between people who are related (like first or second cousin, for example) would be considered as incest.

<sup>125</sup> For the examples from rural Greece, cf. Roger Just in Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991. Of course, I have to note that relations between kin in Macedonia do not exhibit the same amount of ambivalence and perplexity as Just cites. On the other hand, Ford (1983: 21) notes the importance of interpersonal connections (*vrski*) in the capital, Skopje.

<sup>126</sup> Of course, following the critical remarks by Herzfeld (1987: 5 ff), I do not wish to imply that this is *the* code around which all the society is structured — just the fact that many (if not all) relations between families are closely related to the issues that have to do with honor/shame.

<sup>127</sup> Miličić studied the village Selo on the island of Hvar, Croatia. I am not sure that I would use the word “hierarchy” to refer to the social stratification in Prespa, since the egalitarian principles are very

jeopardize this position" (Milićić 1995: 134; footnote added). Therefore, family pressures regarding the choice of the partner for marriage are quite frequent and difficult to ignore. In many cases, it is preferred for a girl living in Macedonia to marry "at home," thus enabling her to remain in close contact with her parents. Bilateral descent is the rule, with either patrilocal or neolocal residence. Even in cases of neolocal residence, it is expected that the newlyweds' parents will provide most of the funds necessary for the building of a house, with labor (and some materials when possible) provided by kinspeople. Matrilocal residence is very rare, and it usually happens in cases where the bride's family is much better off than the groom's. Since most people tend to marry within their social groups (i.e., rich marry rich, middle class marry middle class, and poor marry poor), this is rarely the case.<sup>128</sup> Remaining unmarried is still considered very bad, especially for girls.<sup>129</sup> Of course, the fact that more girls nowadays attend high schools and universities has contributed to the increase of the age at marriage — not so long ago, a girl who did not marry by the time she was in her early twenties would remain unmarried for the rest of her life, or marry some widowed octogenarian.

This is somewhat puzzling, since I found out that the marriage age between the two World Wars was slightly higher. In fact, it seems that the reduced age at marriage is a relatively recent (post-WW II) phenomenon, not unlike the situation that Segalen mentions for the rural France, where between 1825 and 1975 the average age of men at marriage fell from 28.7 to 25.03 years, while for the women in the same period from 26.1 to 22.91 (Segalen 1986: 118, 140).<sup>130</sup> I have observed that people

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strong. Of course, everyone knows which families are "well off" — so that potential marriage alliances might be arranged.

<sup>128</sup> On the other hand, it is socially acceptable for girls to marry into families that are better off — which is normally not the case for boys.

<sup>129</sup> However, in some instances it can be justified by "higher motives" — nuns and scholars come into this category. Homosexuality is not even considered as a possibility.

<sup>130</sup> Unfortunately, it would be impossible to gather comparable statistical data for Prespa. Since what is today the Republic of Macedonia was occupied by Serbia from 1912 until 1941, birth certificates for

in their 70s and 80s (the exact age is sometimes difficult to determine — see footnote 13) have children in their 30s and 40s — which is very different from the couples that got married in the last 20 or 25 years. It seems that the relative affluence of the post-1945 Prespa did push the age at marriage downwards, although the recent changes in society, higher percentage of women in education and employed women is pushing it back again.

Being married is “the norm” — quite similar to the situation in rural Greece (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991). To quote an example based on the Greek material, but the same applies to Macedonia: “(...) it is obvious that a Greek man cannot achieve full adult status until he is married. In a sense then, it is through his connection to a woman that a man takes his place in society. It is his ‘destiny’ also to be married (Dubisch 1991: 45).”<sup>131</sup> Therefore, unmarried people arouse a certain amount of suspicion (if not curiosity); the fact that they are unmarried is considered with some apprehension — attributed to their unorthodox lifestyles (in the case of teachers or scholars) or perhaps to some hidden misfortune in the family.

Chastity is (at least in conversations and in public discourse) very highly regarded where girls are concerned, but not boys — so clearly there are double-standards regarding sex life.<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, although regarding chastity highly *as a principle*, people (especially those born after 1950) rarely expect

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boys were frequently forged — to prevent them from being conscripted into the army. In the years right after the WWII, most of the churches in Prespa were burned in a zealous display of the new (communist) faith, so the the existing church records were also destroyed.

<sup>131</sup> Women in the Greek village where Dubisch did her fieldwork felt sorry for her for being so far away from her mother. The mother/daughter relationship is a very strong one in Macedonia as well. Furthermore, I was introduced to people in Prespa as the son of my mother. In my case, my mother is an ethnic Macedonian, while my father is not — however, I encountered several examples where people whose both parents were ethnic Macedonians were introduced in the same way.

<sup>132</sup> Herzfeld (1987: 11) notes that the prudishness that Balkan peoples display regarding sex may be of quite recent origin — not much earlier than the 19th century!

this to be a fact where the lives of their own children are concerned.<sup>133</sup> In communities like Resen, it is understood that a high school couple that starts a serious relationship (the community is too small for such things to be successfully hidden) will eventually marry. The expectations might not materialize if they choose radically different paths in life (i.e., one chooses to go to the university to Skopje or Bitola, while the other one stays “at home”) or if their families have very bad relations.

Family pressures (at least the ones expressed in a more overt way) tend to be especially strong regarding the non-Slav Macedonian population — in Prespa, Turks and some Albanians.<sup>134</sup> Of course, these pressures can be ignored, but with a heavy price: in one instance, an Albanian woman from a nearby village refused to follow her family’s choice and ran away from home to marry the man she loved. As a consequence, her family cut off all ties with her — and this was especially harsh regarding the girl’s inability to financially support herself at the time. This was no ordinary family, since the woman’s mother was a famous healer (in Macedonian: *mestač*, literally “bone setter”<sup>135</sup>), so the whole story was widely known.<sup>136</sup> Even when the woman’s mother got very old and was living alone, she refused any contact with her daughter, receiving some help only from her Slav Macedonian neighbors, to

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<sup>133</sup> Pejoska (1993: 98 ff) gives numerous examples from Macedonian oral literature that include and illustrate attitudes towards sex, virginity, marriage, etc.

<sup>134</sup> The Albanians form by far the largest non-Slav ethnic group in Macedonia, with around 23% of the overall population. It is interesting to note that members of other non-Slav ethnic groups in Prespa (like Romas [Gypsies] or Turks, for example) would frequently declare themselves as Albanian at the recent censuses (1991 and 1994).

<sup>135</sup> She used to “fix” broken bones and dislocated joints in such a way that they would heal much quicker than if put into plaster and immobilized by doctors. (For example, if a broken arm would heal in three to four weeks after being “set” by the doctor, the “bone setter’s” treatment would heal it within a week.)

<sup>136</sup> Today, the whole story is told almost as a sort of fairy tale of how love conquers all. The couple are still happily married (with two sons and lovely grandchildren), and the woman is a “bone setter.”



whom she eventually left all her belongings (she was quite wealthy).<sup>137</sup> This is just one example of a “strong woman” — an example that should join others in defying the stereotypical image of dominant men and subservient women in Mediterranean and South European cultures (cf. Miličić 1995 for the examples from the Croatian island Hvar).

Among the Slav Macedonian population, family pressures are very strong as well: I know of several relationships which could not end in marriage because of the opposition of parents. “It is for the good of the child,” is the usual answer by the family members opposing “bad” relationships. Most recently, particular pressures are exercised on multi-ethnic couples: it is preferred (socially, as well as within the family) that a girl or a boy chooses a partner of the “proper” (i. e., their own) nationality.<sup>138</sup> This should be seen both as a consequence of the prevailing Orthodox Christian teachings (since Slav Macedonian population tends automatically to get identified with the Orthodox Christianity as opposed to Muslim Albanian or Turkish population<sup>139</sup> — the fact that very few people practice religion is of no relevance here), as well as one of the problems facing all small newly emerging (post-1991) countries in the attempts led by nationalists to preserve the ethnic “purity” of the nation.

Almost as bad as remaining unmarried is being without children. In a culture that emphasizes (and is structured around) family so much, not having anyone to

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<sup>137</sup> The power to heal is regarded as a gift — children are never taught it, unless they display interest by themselves — and it is regarded as an insult if one tries to pay the healer. On the other hand, it is considered appropriate to leave some amount of money (usually the equivalent of a price of beer or a coffee in a restaurant, or “instead of buying a chocolate for the children”) for the good luck (in Turkish: *adet*, literally “peace”).

<sup>138</sup> I use words “ethnicity” and “nationality” synonymously. My preferred term for “nation” or “tribe” is “ethnic group.”

<sup>139</sup> What is today the Republic of Macedonia was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire from 1371 until 1912. This plays well for nationalists when they try to evoke anti-Albanian feelings (Albanians, considered as Muslim, being identified as Turks) as the rallying cry for national (in this case, Slav Macedonian) unity and salvation.



inherit the family name is considered quite a disaster.<sup>140</sup> In a metaphysical sense, this leads not only to a family gradually “dying out,” but to a rupture in the whole system of the kinship network. This network heavily relies on the mutual help and cooperation between kinsfolk — especially on the occasion like the building of a house, preparation for a wedding or some other important family ritual, etc.

The marriage also enables closer economic ties between the two families (since marriage in rural and suburban communities is primarily *a contract between the families*): the groom is supposed to help his bride’s family when they work their land outside the village or town. In the case of Resen, a great majority of households own small tracts of land outside the town.<sup>141</sup> A tract of land is called *bavča* — which roughly translates into English as “garden,” and the people usually use them as orchards.<sup>142</sup> Most townspeople are fully employed, but after coming home in the afternoon (except in the winter months), they go and work the *bavča*. In cases where men are fully employed and women are housewives, women do most of the work in the orchards. The work is usually divided in such a way that men care more for the trees in the orchards (or for vineyards), and women for the vegetables. The responsibilities for domestic animals are normally evenly shared. However, there are no strict rules over the division of work — everyone works based on the time that

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<sup>140</sup> However, there is a way around this: some people can adopt a child (or children) of their close relatives (brothers, sisters). The children are then considered to be theirs in both legal and biological senses. Children are offered for adoption in case of death or illness in the family, but also in cases when a family is too poor to take care of them (usually a family living in a village), in which case they would send them to town (or city).

<sup>141</sup> However, the older houses (as well as some on the town’s outskirts) do have these tracts of land in their own courtyards, in the town itself.

<sup>142</sup> They also grow vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, watermelons, etc., as well as a variety of fruits (apricots, peaches, various kinds of plums, cherries, etc.). Some people also have vineyards. Domestic animals are quite frequently kept in the *bavčas*.

Prespa is the biggest apple-producing region in Macedonia. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of the break up of Yugoslavia was the loss of the most important market — a situation that is felt very much throughout the region.

he/she has, abilities, etc. The only gender-specific area seems to be household chores like cooking (women are expected to cook) — although I think that this has to do with the simple fact that the women used to be around the house (home) much more, and that changes in the employment patterns will affect this as well. Also, when the visitors come, and if both spouses are at home, women are expected to prepare coffee and serve the *blago* (a thick and very sweet fruity jam), while the men are expected to cater for drinks.

There is a certain amount of ambivalence when one tries to collect narratives on the “status of women.” On the one hand, women are considered as equal in terms of family contributions, work in and around the household, etc.<sup>143</sup> The “way of men” and the “way of women” is supposed to be different primarily because of biological differences. In and around Prespa there is a belief that “things have always been done in a certain way” — so that way should be followed. On the other hand, gender hierarchy is overtly very strong; until quite recently it was common for a married woman to be addressed by her husband’s name plus the female gender prefix. For example, a woman married to a man called Bore would be called *Boreica*, the one married to a man called Krume, *Krumeica*, etc. In fact, the Macedonian language does have different forms of last names for men and women. For example, in a family whose father (and all the males) have the last name Petreski, the women’s surname will be *Petreska*, where the male name is Nikolov, the female equivalent will be *Nikolova*, etc.<sup>144</sup>

Sexism is present in the Macedonian language — but not to an extreme extent. For example, some authors would stress that there is a gender-neutral word for human being, *covek*, which cannot be readily translated into English, because it

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<sup>143</sup> Cases where a woman retains her own family name are extremely rare and in a suburban context something that is frowned upon. This is very different from Slovenia, where most recently women just add their husband’s last name to their own — sometimes resulting in a middle initial.

<sup>144</sup> A great majority of Slav Macedonian last names finish with *-ov* or *-ski* for the males or *-ova* or *-ska* for the females.

would correspond to English *man* — while in the Macedonian it covers both *man* and *woman* (Gjurovska 1995: 25). On the other hand, in everyday practice, the word *covek* is never used to refer to a woman!

Equality is not something that is locally discussed or questioned in any way. There is a notion of fundamental difference between men and women — the difference that is expressed in their “vocations” in life. Men are supposed to be “providers” in all senses of the word, do most of the work in the *bavčas*, etc. They are also expected to contribute more money to the family budget — now that women are frequently taking full time jobs (a situation unheard of in Prespa until the early 1970s), the men whose wives make more money than they do are subject to jokes and denigrating gossip. The situation is made worse by the economic crises in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a result of which many businesses went out of work — the job losses affecting mostly men. However, this kind of situation also puts more emphasis on the money (and the overall labor) that women contribute. For the first time in their lives, many of the women in their 30s or 40s find their work really (at least openly) appreciated. In most cases, it is their work that literally enables their families to make ends meet.

## “STRAIGHT FROM HEAVEN” OR “STRAIGHT TO HELL”: SEX, POWER, AND VIOLENCE

The problem of violence against women is unfortunately a universal one (cf. Human Rights Watch Women’s Rights Project 1995) — and this goes for Macedonia as well.<sup>145</sup> “*Batina je iz raja izašla*” (lit. “The cudgel came straight from Heaven”) is a Serbian saying that is frequently quoted both in the context of discussing children

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<sup>145</sup> On the problem of violence in the rural communities in Balkans, see for example Denich 1974.

(implying usually that a little smack here or there can cause no harm) and women. In the latter context, the implication is that one must know who is “the head of the household” — and this general view is supported by both men and women.

In the summer of 1994, newspapers like the Skopje-based *Večer* and *Nova Makedonija* and the independent weekly *Puls* widely reported on an incident that happened during a reception in London. The then mayor of Skopje, Goran Nikolovski, beat up his wife because he did not like the fact that she spoke to someone at the reception. (The fact that he had had a few drinks before might have contributed to his behavior.) The incident spilled over into a massive fight and police had to intervene. The fact that the journalists wrote about it was immediately attacked by both the mayor’s office (he belonged to the main opposition party, VMRO-DPMNE) as some kind of a political ploy to discredit the young and gifted (in his early 30s) politician. However, no one seemed really interested in the issue of violence, its causes or the consequences. The mayor’s wife, Vesna Nikolovska, wrote a letter to the media accusing them of “sensationalizing” the “private life” of their family. So even the victim (and this was definitively not an isolated incident that took place “behind closed doors” or “in private”!) went along with the stance that there was essentially nothing wrong with violence. Or at least that there was nothing wrong where married couples are concerned. This is a dangerous situation when even the victim starts perceiving the world through the eyes of the perpetrator — somehow believing (genuinely believing!) that he has “the right” to resort to violence. Even when the violence gets so far that the police are called, the authorities are reluctant to intervene.

In everyday conversations, and especially among the older people, it is usually “understood” what the “ideal woman” should be like: hard working, tidy, clean, and capable of taking care of the children and the household.<sup>146</sup> If she fails in

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<sup>146</sup> It is interesting to note that these are also the characteristics for the “ideal man” — with the exception of the ability for taking care of the children and the household.

any of these aspects, some violence is seen as justified. ("She should know who is the boss in the house!") Of course, very few (if any) people would actually approve of violence against their daughter or sister or kin — although approving of it "in principle"! If a woman feels mistreated, she can just leave her household and go back to her own family. In some cases, male members of her family are likely to beat up her husband or boyfriend as a revenge. Younger women (and this goes for younger couples in general) seem less inclined to support the old sayings and beliefs, and this contributes to the higher divorce rates in recent years.

According to the data from the Center for Social Work in Skopje, there are currently 600 to 750 divorces per year (compared to 4,000 to 5,000 marriages per year) in the Skopje area, and in the majority of cases women initiate the divorce (Zlatanović 1994). According to the official data for the whole country, in 1993 there were 15,080 marriages and 636 divorces (Government of the Republic of Macedonia 1995: 8) — which would mean that almost all divorces occur in the area of the capital.

Domestic violence is not recognized as a crime within the Macedonian legal system. This is part of the reason why most cases of domestic violence never get reported. The disparity between the legal and the real even goes as far as the penal code regarding sexual assault as a crime only if inflicted on a stranger! According to a recent investigative article by Macedonian journalists Suzana Ahmeti and Ljubica Balaban,

[a] common complaint is that the existence of domestic violence in Macedonia passes almost unnoticed in the courts. It is not mentioned in the criminal law. Milka Risteva, a former judge and an advisor in the Ministry of Justice, is among those who believe Macedonia should adopt a domestic violence law following the American model, in which even threatening violence can be considered a crime. Such a law is not being considered now. But Risteva said that a proposal

[which is] now [being considered] in the government would change the family law [in such a way as] to ban sexual violence in marriage, in love affairs and during the process of divorce.

(Ahmeti and Balaban 1996)

The problem of violence is more present in highly urbanized areas such as the capital, where people are still searching for their “true” identity.<sup>147</sup> Of course, this does not mean that when people find (or suddenly stumble upon) their “true” identity they suddenly become non-violent — it only means that more violence tend to be produced under stress. Hardship is invariably a contributing factor.

In Prespa, the issue gets more complicated by the increased economic power of women as well as by the need of both sides of the family (as well as both families together) to coordinate their activities when issues like the working of the *bavcas*, vineyards, care of animals, building or repair of the houses, etc. come into play.<sup>148</sup> On the other side of the spectrum, the more rural communities take the more patriarchal (and pro-violence) view. According to Duško Minovski, director of the Center for Social Work in Skopje, the situation is especially bad for the Roma women, who seem to be mistreated almost on a regular basis (Zlatanović 1994). In the highly acclaimed<sup>149</sup> recent film *Before the Rain*, an Albanian girl pays for falling in love with the person of the wrong nationality with her own life.

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<sup>147</sup> On the question of the “mapping” of the urban identity in Skopje, see Thiessen 1995.

<sup>148</sup> It has been pointed out to me (Ilka Thiessen, personal communication) that this might be the determining factor regarding the status of women in Prespa. In other areas (like in the vicinity of Prilep, for example) women are practically prevented from inheriting the property (by the family pressures and tradition according to which sons inherit everything). They are asked to take a token sum of money in return for the formal refusal of the right of inheritance, but it is considered “good manners” for daughters to refuse even this token sum.

<sup>149</sup> A film by Milčo Mančevski won the “Golden Lion” at the Venice Film Festival in 1994 and was nominated for an Oscar in 1995.



Somewhat surprisingly,<sup>150</sup> violence has nothing to do with the level of education. Highly educated<sup>151</sup> men tend to be as violent towards their partners as the less educated ones (Zlatanović 1994; Ahmeti and Balaban 1996). Unfortunately, it usually takes a most extreme situation before the problem of violence is discussed in public. There were eleven murders in Macedonia in 1994, and in nine of them victims were women (Ahmeti and Balaban 1996). In a highly publicized case in the summer of 1994, a 101-year old Bitola man killed his 73-year old wife because he suspected that she was having a “fling.”

However, it is still difficult to generalize on the problem of violence. All of my informants in Prespa born after 1950 were strongly opposed to it. I know personally of only one<sup>152</sup> younger couple where violence did occur — but the woman did put up with it (the fact that her family does not live in the region might have contributed to this). Violence is based on the notion of hierarchy: men are presumed to have “higher” status in society and violence can be seen as a way of reasserting their domination. But while notion of hierarchy has been often assumed, I found it difficult to notice it in the actual *ethnographic* context<sup>153</sup> in Prespa. In all the contexts that I have observed, one can speak about the notion of *complementarity*, quite similar to the examples that Segalen provides from 17th and 18th century rural France:

The central hypothesis of the book is that the man-wife relationship in peasant society is based not on the absolute authority of one over the other, but on the complementarity. This relationship is determined by the particular nature of peasant sociability: before being a couple, the

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<sup>150</sup> At least for me, since I did expect that the more educated people are, the less likely they will be to use violent means to resolve their disputes.

<sup>151</sup> That is to say, men with the university degree.

<sup>152</sup> Of course, even one is too much!

<sup>153</sup> For the notion of context, I refer to Holy 1994.

man and wife form part of the male and female groups which make up the basic framework of human relationships.

(Segalen 1983: 9)

This image that Segalen presents for rural France is to a large extent applicable to Prespa. There is no strict hierarchy in the family or in the society. Men and women are recognized as different — and these differences enable them to function together. Of course, in the case of Macedonia (and Prespa in particular), one cannot talk about “groups” in the same sense — but there are clearly defined categories in which men and women “fall” — and they seem to quite similar. The notion of *complementarity* rather than of *subordination* requires different attitudes. Women in cities, away from their families, are more likely to become exposed to domestic violence than the ones in rural and semi-urban communities.

Furthermore, while family pressures may be detrimental and highly oppressive in terms of choice of partner, they frequently serve as an effective deterrent against domestic violence (because, as already noted, woman’s male relatives might just decide on revenge). Of course, only effective changes in the legal area can provide a significant step forward.

## KEEPERS OF THE FAMILY: GENDER ROLES AT THE CROSSROADS

According to the 1994 census, women form 49.6% of the total population of the Republic of Macedonia. They also form 37.5% of the employed — the fact that 47.6% of women are capable of work shows that in many communities it is still considered “natural” for a woman to stay at home. On the other hand, the percentage of women among the unemployed has fallen to 48.5 from 50.4 since 1991

(Government of the Republic of Macedonia 1995: 15-17) — although this is more due to the fact that more and more men lose their jobs, than to some trend towards increasing employment of women. One of the most notable statistics is a large discrepancy in illiteracy rates: for the rural population, it is 5.1% for men but 15.2% for women (total 10%), and for the city population 1.75 for men and 5.7% for women (total 3.7%).<sup>154</sup> These numbers should be put in the context of age, since 75.58% of illiterate women were aged 55 or over — a remnant of the time when it was believed unnecessary for a girl to attend a school or even to learn to read.<sup>155</sup>

When it comes to education, there are “feminine” and “masculine” fields — based on the numbers of students that enroll for certain courses or colleges. Among the former ones are chemical-technological training courses, arts, services, textile, leather-processing and medical cares; while the latter ones include electrotechnics, mining, mechanical engineering, and wood-processing. When it comes to university-level education, the majority of students (52.8%) are women, but the majority of them still do not continue their education as far as their male counterparts: in 1994, out of 67 M.A. and M.Sc. degrees, 25 were received by women, while out of 49 Ph.D. degrees, only 18 were awarded to women.

The role of women is still traditionally regarded as something that has to do with family and children. Several women’s organizations that were formed in the early 1990s are based either in Skopje (the capital, with around 700,000 inhabitants) or its immediate vicinity (Tetovo) — so it is open to debate how much of an impact these groups (set up by educated, city-dwelling women) can have in the rural and suburban areas.<sup>156</sup> The women organized in these groups would definitively not

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<sup>154</sup> The data are based on the 1991 census and cover people aged ten and over (Government of the Republic of Macedonia 1995: 12).

<sup>155</sup> My own grandmother was illiterate.

<sup>156</sup> These groups are: Organization of Women of Macedonia, The Alliance of Organizations of Women of the Republic of Macedonia, Women’s Organization of Skopje, Women’s Club “Spark of Life,” The Association of Vlach Women in the Republic of Macedonia, The Humanitarian Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women of the City of Skopje (Skopje), and

accept the "family + children" equation as *the* definition of the place of women. However, in the last general elections (in 1994), only 3 women became MPs (in the 120-seat National Assembly), and of the 20 ministers in the Macedonian government, they hold only two posts (in the properly "feminine" areas: science and education).<sup>157</sup>

On the other hand, the "family + children" equation seems to be the one that women themselves are ready to accept. For example, a recent survey in a textile factory indicated that most workers (the majority were women) would (if given the opportunity) rather stay at home and take care of their children (Gjurovska 1995: 45). Much less than a longing for the "male-dominated world," I would interpret this as a reaction to the dramatic (and swift) changes in the politics and economy in former communist countries — confronted with the immense insecurity ("market economy" here means a 40% unemployment rate and more than half of the population living below the official poverty line) of the "brave new" (post-communist or post-socialist, as it is sometimes called) world, people simply want to be back to the basic unit of their society, the unit that always cares and provides for its members: the family.

Macedonia is not as industrialized as Slovenia, for example, so some of the problems regarding transition of the family into industrial and post-industrial age are not present in Macedonian contexts.<sup>158</sup> Second and third cousins (as well as their

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Albanian Women League (Tetovo). These groups are fairly strictly organized along ethnic lines, and the cooperation between, for example, the ones that consist of Slav Macedonian women and the ones that consist of Albanian women is practically non-existent.

<sup>157</sup> This is comparable to the situation in Croatia, where women account for slightly more than 50% of the population, 43% of the employed — but only 4% of the members of Parliament (Scavina 1996). See also Einhorn 1993: 150-151 for the comparison with East Central European countries.

On the other hand, according to the data for 1992, more than half of all the employed in the Parliament (273 out of 495) were women (Government of the Republic of Macedonia 1995: 10). This probably signifies that if they are participating in politics and in decision-making processes, women's proper place is seen primarily as secretaries or low-ranking assistants.

<sup>158</sup> In most general terms, some of the problems are a loss of the cultural ties of migrant workers that come into the cities, a rising number of abandoned children and illegitimate births, an increasing rate of juvenile delinquency, etc. (cf. Segalen 1986).

children) are readily recognized as “members of the family.” The practice of putting elderly people in special “old people’s homes” is seen as extremely savage and brutal: one has a duty towards one’s parents<sup>159</sup> — the only exception being illness which requires hospital treatment and intensive care.

Women are traditionally seen as the “pillars” of the family. Of course, it is through men that the family name is passed on,<sup>160</sup> but the role of women is recognized very clearly. In her 1995 paper “Women of the family, women of the nation,” Anastasia Karakasidou traces the changes that occurred in the families of Slav Macedonians in northern Greece after 1903. Quoting from the 1931 book *Agrotika* by Kostas Karavidas, Karakasidou refers to the Slavic Macedonian women,

as being of a ‘special kind’: they were individuals of great physical stamina, wives and mothers who worked not only for the family’s land but also its cottage industry (...). Behind the superficial silence of the *zadruga* women, Karavidas saw human beings who were lay experts on religion, rituals, superstitions, songs, proverbs, legends, popular wisdom, and experience.

(Karakasidou 1995: 8, footnote omitted)

Karakasidou then mentions the example of *slava*. *Slava* is by far the most important family and religious holiday among many Orthodox Christian peoples. It commemorates the family patron saint and it is a ritual of great significance. It is the most important day of the year, when all the members of a family and their close friends get together for a meal and (in case of wealthier and more “traditionally oriented” families) a blessing from the priest. According to Karavidas, “by the

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<sup>159</sup> In the same way as parents have a duty to care for their children. This duty ends only when children are able to financially sustain themselves — so it can go even after the children are 25 or 30 years old.

<sup>160</sup> The curse “May your name be extinguished!” is one of the worst things that Macedonians can say to each other. Families without male children are frequently looked upon as the ones which are “losing” their name, and by extension, the ones that are in the process of disappearing. (A way out is sometimes adoption of the children of close relatives who are too poor to care for them.)

second decade of the twentieth century, some families had rescheduled or recast their *slava* as a commemoration of a meaningful political event, such as ‘the local revolution of 1903’ ” (Karakasidou 1995: 9, footnote and reference omitted). The ‘local revolution of 1903’ refers to the Ilinden uprising against the Ottoman Empire, started by Macedonian revolutionaries in and around Kruševo on 2 August 1903 — the uprising failed after some ten days, but the date is celebrated as the Macedonian national holiday. Obviously, changing the date of such an important *family* ritual influenced by a major *political* event meant a very important step in the process of establishing the national identity. And it was the women of the family that played the crucial role in this process:

From pagan deities to Christian patron saints to national political movements, the *slava* provided a symbolic metaphor for the family’s identity as well as an institutionalized forum for the ritual expression of the family’s place in the cosmos, both secular and supernatural (...). Women played a critical role in this process, for while even though the decision to reconstitute the family *slava* as a political commemoration could very well have been made by the male family head, it was the women who controlled the ‘hidden meaning’ of the *slava* symbolism and taught it to their children.

(Karakasidou 1995: 9-10)

This combines well with my own observations that women are more likely to be involved with children and their homeworks, they will more often attend the teachers/parents meetings at schools,<sup>161</sup> etc. Of course, this is again dependent on the amount of time that the parents have — men are more likely to be away from the

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<sup>161</sup> There are two elementary schools in Resen, “Mite Bogoevski” and “Goce Delčev.” The first one is “mixed” — that is to say, has classes both in Macedonian and in Turkish — while the other one is “purely” Slav Macedonian. In recent years, and with the upsurge of nationalist feelings in the Balkans, some parents whose children would have normally attended the first one opted for the “Goce Delčev.” However, the teachers from “Mite Bogoevski” are more than happy to point out that “their” children are much more successful when they continue their education and proceed to the high school.



household during the day — especially in the spring and summer, when the working of the *bavčas* is most important. In the cases when women work and men are more at home, they will attend the school meetings. This further exemplifies the notion of *complementarity* referred to in the previous section. Pejoska (1993: 123) notes the paradoxicality of the situation where women actually have some powers “traditionally” reserved for men (for example, the mother has a very important power to approve or disapprove of her son’s marriage), but at the same time consciously abstain from using them. For her, this represents both the “support” for the patriarchal structure of the society, as well as the seeds of its destruction.

One of the most striking features of everyday discourses in Prespa is the fact that men like to present things in such a way as if they are “in charge.” At the same time, they know very well that they are not “in charge” — the whole structure of the family collapses if the woman decides (or is forced by mistreatment) to walk away or simply to abstain from family duties. However, men still go on with this kind of presentation and women let them get away with it, while at the same time both men and women know (and they know that at the same time “the other side” or “the other sex” knows it all too well) that what is presented as the “official story” has nothing to do with the way things are.

To conclude, both the concept of hyperreality and the concept of difference(s) plays a significant part in the understanding of gender relations in Prespa. Although superficially there is an established hierarchy (with women subordinated to men), in practice, this hierarchy seems to be a rationalizing illusion. I do not claim that men and women are completely *equal* (in particular, women lack significant political power), but their relations can be understood much better if one bases her or his observations on the concept of *complementarity*, where men and women *because they are different* provide different (and mutually compatible) elements that enable this community to function.

# What's in a name?

## Contemporary feminist discourses in the Republic of Slovenia

(...) stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus.

(Eco 1983: 502)



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**Map 2** The Republic of Slovenia. After Perry-Castañeda Library Internet page, Online.



## INTRODUCTION: DEFINING “FEMINISTS”

Woman is by her very being more conservative, representing better her own species than herself, she does not like abstract things — that is why we, men, tell her that she is not logical (and she really is not!), she intuitively realizes the right position, she is very emotional, etc.

(Bozo Skerlj, “Men and women: Is the woman less valid?” [1929]; quoted in Zavirsek 1994: 160)

In this chapter, I will look at the situation in Slovenia, insofar as it relates to the issues of gender construction. Going back to the questions outlined above (p. 87), I will attempt to answer the second one, *what is the meaning of gender for men and women in specific cultures?* I am especially interested in the ways in which feminist authors themselves construct gender, and how this relates to “the global picture” — as far as Slovenia is concerned (that is to say, how do their writings and activities relate to the “ordinary people” and everyday discourses). I will begin with data referring to some recent gender-related debates in Slovenia, proceed with the notions of “gender construction” including questions related to violence, and conclude with some empirical data referring to the gender-related socialization of children.

The data are based on observations and interviews which I conducted during August and September 1995 in and around Ljubljana,<sup>162</sup> as well as on numerous written materials that I have access to. Most of the materials that I shall refer to are indeed written by leading Slovenian feminist authors and scholars.

To declare oneself as a “feminist” in Slovenia can be quite risky. On the one hand, it can earn oneself some prestige in intellectual (especially academic) circles.

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<sup>162</sup> Ljubljana (population: around 350,000) is the capital of Slovenia. The Republic of Slovenia gained independence from the SFR Yugoslavia in 1991. It has a territory of 20,256 square kilometers and approximately 1.989 million inhabitants.

On the other hand, this relies to a great extent on the social milieu that a person is situated in. Intellectuals (women<sup>163</sup>) can be “feminists,” but then the question arises as to whether they actually become enclosed (and their respective discourses<sup>164</sup> encapsulated) within their own social group. Within the group, everyone understands everyone else, and everyone knows what the point of discussion is — but the further one gets away from the group, the less intelligible these discourses become, and the more it seems that the people involved in them are just talking to themselves (something like talking to one’s own image in the mirror). Finally, there are large segments of society (middle class, working class, people without higher education) to whom feminist discourses mean nothing at all. In everyday life, even the intellectuals tend to shy away from using the “f” word (Salecl 1995:46).

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<sup>163</sup> Unlike in the West, men (at least, a great majority of them, and this does include intellectuals) do not consider themselves as “feminists” — the word can be used in a derogatory sense when applied to them. The Slovenian word **feminizem** is a male-gender noun, while the derivatives **feminist** and **feministka** are of male and female gender respectively.

Slovenian intellectuals are usually (the exception being writers) people with second-degree University level education or higher (the equivalent of British M.Phil., as well as Ph.D.). They have comparatively well-paid jobs — usually within the Universities (there are two Universities in Slovenia, University of Ljubljana, and University of Maribor), or research institutes. Their higher earnings and job security clearly set them apart from the majority of the population. This perhaps contributes to a sense of isolation, which makes their discourses very different from the ones that one would normally encounter in everyday conversations.

<sup>164</sup> By “feminist discourses,” I mean all the discourses that address the questions relating to the disproportion of powers and rights, inasmuch they relate to gender. For a working definition of feminism, I again refer to Baber (1993:47). The aim of these discourses should be, among other things, “that a female applicant’s chances of being hired as a dishwasher, computer salesperson, gardener, mail room clerk or fork-lift operator should be the same as male applicant’s. It means in addition that women should not have to work harder than men to get the same recognition, or undertake a “double-shift” if they work outside the home, or forego having children in order to have a career, or be [the] subject of isolation, ridicule or harassment if they succeed in obtaining “non-traditional” jobs. It means, in short that the male/female playing field should be level” (Baber, *ibid.*). I understand the contemporary feminist discourses in the Republic of Slovenia to be oriented exactly towards making “the playing field” level. But it is not the understanding of the majority of Slovenian people, a point to which I will come back to later.

To give an example of attitudes towards feminism, in a recent televised debate on the greater inclusion of women in politics, arguments that stressed “biological superiority” as the reason why women should take the most powerful and decision-making positions in politics were presented. It is exactly because they are women and (as such) have specific characteristics which define them as women: greater patience, good intuition, greater ability to cooperate and to listen to “the other side,” etc., that they should be given important positions and greater responsibilities. So the (desired) greater participation of women in everyday political life has nothing to do with their professional capabilities, but rather with their (biological or socially constructed<sup>165</sup>) nature. On the other hand, it has to be stressed that some feminists in Slovenia do occasionally take the “biological argument” in order to justify the need for more women in the decision-making arenas, in politics, legislature, etc. They seem to be lost when the same “biological arguments” are used against women in general.<sup>166</sup>

This “biologically-centered” view of men and women (and the differences between them) is a legacy of both the communist ideology (Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia since Slovenians decided to unite with Croats and Serbs in 1918; a communist ideology was the official state ideology in Yugoslavia from 1945 until its dissolution in 1991<sup>167</sup>) and the specific world view stressed by the influential representatives of the Catholic church. On the one hand, during the communist period, equality was officially proclaimed — although it did not persist in everyday life. Of course, certain positive things that happened in this period (like the introduction of day-care and kindergartens, maternity leave, equal pay for the same

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<sup>165</sup> It is clear that in the present (Slovenian) context the female “biological” self is actually a social construction. That is to say, women are *expected to be patient, intuitive, cooperative and to listen to the others* — it certainly does not mean that it is always (or even in the majority of cases) happening.

<sup>166</sup> I am very grateful to Vesna Godina for pointing this out to me.

<sup>167</sup> Many of the current Slovenian politicians are former communists and some (like the Slovenian president, Mr Milan Kučan) held important positions for many years within both the Slovenian and the Yugoslav communist hierarchy.



work, etc.) did improve the position of women, but with all this the problem of gender inequality did not disappear, it just became less visible. Patriarchal ideology<sup>168</sup> was still incorporated in all segments of the society. To quote from Renata Salecl:

For example, the liberalization of abortion did not come into being as a realization of a woman's right, but as a primarily hygienic measure, which both put an end to illegal abortions and enabled women to quickly return to work. Socialism promoted a specific type of women — revolutionaries, communist activists — who entered politics through a system of quotas. This was the image of a woman dressed in a grey suit, without any make-up, and who was also a die-hard proponent of communism.

(1995: 46)

The problem is, as Salecl says, that today in Slovenia the word "feminist" provokes exactly the same set of associations and imagery, feminists being described as sexually frustrated women deprived of any femininity. In this context, whenever the word is used in Slovenia, it is necessary to stress that feminism does not actually advocate the extermination of men — merely the equal treatment of women. It is hardly surprising then that the female TV presenter of the debate referred to above, quickly pointed out that "of course, there is no feminism involved here!"

The other important influence is the legacy of the Catholic Church. In fact, the very beginnings of anthropology in Slovenia (primarily associated with the name of Dr Božo Škerlj) are connected with the ideological discussions about gender differences and differentiation (cf. Zaviršek 1994: 161 ff). Škerlj, who published works that would today be broadly classified as falling within the parameters of "gender studies," mostly in the 1920s and 1930s,<sup>169</sup> was a radical proponent of

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<sup>168</sup> This is a term relatively frequently used by Slovenian feminists, as well as the phrase "androcentric culture." Although it seems to me that both terms lack a proper definition and might be too general, I will use them when referring to writings of feminist authors that do use them — like Salecl in this instance (cf. also Jogan 1990, 1991, 1994c; as well as Jogan and Šadl 1994).

<sup>169</sup> For the specific references, cf. the bibliography in Zaviršek 1994: 297-298.

eugenics (which he saw as a way of improving the "quality" of the society that he was living in) and some of his views could well be classified as fascist. However, he was continuing a line of thinking (initiated by the Slovenian sociologists of Catholic orientation) that accepted the gender hierarchy as something "given," as something already "there" (in the "real world"), so that the only thing that the scholars could do was not to question this hierarchy, but to try to explain it.<sup>170</sup> If the hierarchy was there, the thinking was, god had something to do with it. Therefore, the gender hierarchy is a part of his original design. But why is it so? In order to give the right answer to this question, social scientists from the late 19th and the early 20th century had to, ultimately, justify the norms and regulations of the society they were living in. These justifications and explanations were, according to Maca Jogan "supposed to contribute to the harmonization of society in general, and to peaceful relations between the genders. By these explanations, rooted in the Thomist doctrine, the 'proper' answers regarding the burning demands of equal rights (in the field of economy, politics, education) for both genders were constructed" (1994a: 90). To quote further from the same article:

These explanations have been justifying male authority [on all levels] from the family to the state, and even in Heaven, by stressing the "natural" role of the woman as mother and housewife with specific basic personal characteristics ([she was supposed] to be obedient, passionate, modest, suffering, awe-stricken). The constant advocacy of women's domestication also presented the basis for the evaluation of women's entrance into the public sphere. Women's public activity was allowed only if they were aware and prepared to accept their primary "natural" role. In this way, the notion of the material and

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<sup>170</sup> Of course, this also has to be seen within the context of the rising dangers that the emergence of the first feminist groups created in Slovenia (which was until 1918 part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire); the first Slovenian women's organization was formed in 1887 as a part of a worker's syndicate in Trieste. The Association of Slovenian Women Teachers was formed in 1898, and the Women's General Association in 1901 (Jogan 1994a: 95n).

moral overburdening of women who are also active outside home has been established as a self-evident (i.e. natural) fact (Jogan 1990).

(Jogan 1994a: 90-91)

Although this kind of legacy is not present among the social scientists today (quite the contrary, a great majority of them being left-wing, Marxist or post-Marxist oriented), it is very prevalent in everyday discourses (on the street, in the bars, cafés, etc. — Slovenian girls definitively do not want to be described as “feminist”<sup>171</sup>). The situation on the political scene is quite different: with the emergence of a multi-party system, the Catholic Church tried (successfully, as some of the recent debates indicate) to put its weight and influence behind different right-wing parties like the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats, <sup>172</sup> etc.

The important factor to be considered here is that religiosity in Slovenia does tend to be influenced by gender. To give an example,<sup>173</sup> in 1978 39% of men and 52% of women described themselves as being religious; in 1993 the respective shares were 57.6% and 63.7%. In 1991 81.4% of all adults had some sort of Catholic education. Among the whole of the religious population in 1993, 56.4% were women. Among the “core believers” (a sub-group that amounts to 13% of all respondents), 71% were women. (Among the unbelievers — 23.2% of all

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<sup>171</sup> But they certainly have nothing against having equal opportunities and equal pay to their male counterparts.

<sup>172</sup> One has to be very careful with the political terminology in the newly emerging (post-1990) countries; so the Social Democrats in Slovenia (SDSS, led by Janez Janša) are essentially a right-wing party (just like the Liberal Democrats are extreme right-wing in Russia, the Democrats in Serbia, etc.). The problem is that there are as well parties whose name does depict their political orientation — like the Social Democrat Action in Croatia, Serbian Social Democratic Party (SDSS/J), etc. I am aware of the confusion that this creates with people used to the “common sense” political denominators, but there is a sense among the newly emerging political elites in former communist countries that (following Humpty Dumpty) words can mean many different things.

<sup>173</sup> I am closely following here an account given by Jogan 1994a: 92-94, where she follows the results of longitudinal research on a representative sample of the adult Slovenian population. This research has been conducted since the late 1970s by several prominent Slovenian sociologists (Roter, Tos). For the exact references, cf. Jogan 1994a: 96-97.

respondents — there were no significant differences between genders.) The 1992 data indicate that God is “very important in life” for 38.1% of women, but barely 30% of men. 61.6% of women, but only 38.4% of men agreed with the statement that “Only the existence of God makes sense of life.” (As Jogan points out, these numbers should also be seen in the context of the much more limited choice that girls have as to whether they will attend some sort of religious education or not. They are usually just told by their parents to go — especially in the rural communities.)

As a direct consequence of the growing importance of the Catholic Church in political life,<sup>174</sup> an interesting coalition of “pro-life” organizations and parties like the Christian Democrats came up with the proposal that maternity leave should last for three years.<sup>175</sup> This is (according to all feminist scholars whom I have met, as well as for Salecl 1995: 47) a highly unusual example of the right-wing parties and organizations demanding women’s rights. The question of the three-year maternity leave<sup>176</sup> was presented as a matter of “free choice” (that is to say, any woman could freely choose whether she wanted to be a mother or a career woman).<sup>177</sup> This debate

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<sup>174</sup> Although not necessarily in everyday life — Jogan (1994a) strongly argues that Slovenia is actually becoming a more secularized society. Here is an example of a specific “clash of values” — on the one hand, the rural and predominantly patriarchal households where girls are frequently told to go to religious schools (while boys are given much more choice); on the other, urban communities where secularization is “the way of life” and the legacy of the previously dominant communist (atheist) ideology still very strong.

<sup>175</sup> More about this proposal and the whole context of this debate in the next chapter.

<sup>176</sup> The materials, opinions, survey results, etc. were published by the Office for Women’s Policy, Government of the Republic of Slovenia 1995a. The surveys of the representative sample of the population conducted in January 1995 indicated that 41.7% of the respondents believed that the three-year maternity leave would have a negative impact on the possibilities for young women to get jobs (as opposed to 19.7% who believed it might have a positive impact). Even more, 50.6%, believed that this would hinder women’s possibilities for promotions — as opposed to 7.9%, who thought that it might have a positive impact (Office for Women’s Policy, Government of the Republic of Slovenia 1995a: 13).

<sup>177</sup> Of course, not much of the “free” or “choice” would remain in terms of the position in which a woman looking for a job would be put after three years of maternity leave.

became connected to that concerning universal child benefits. Proponents of the latter suggested that it would mean that all children would be treated as "equal," forgetting that just as all people are not equal when it comes to their social status, so their children cannot be equal. As a matter of fact, poor families would (if the new proposal becomes law) get up to 40% less in child benefit than they do now (Salecl 1995: 47)!<sup>178</sup> The proposal of a law that would effectively ban abortion was defeated, but the doctors are given the opportunity (at any point that they might choose) of becoming "conscientious objectors" and simply refuse to perform, or give their patient any information on the operation. The paradoxical situation is that many rights that were taken for granted during the communist era (and the freedom to decide how many children a woman [or a couple] will have is certainly one of the more obvious ones) are suddenly becoming the subjects of debates. These debates frequently have very strong political overtones, since everything connected with the communist past (pre-1991 Slovenia) tends to be equated by the right and the nationalist parties as bad a priori and something that should have perished with the communist system. This is definitely not a view with which either feminist authors or a significant number of women would agree. As a prominent Slovenian journalist summed it up: "In spite of all the slander, we have to admit that the old regime had guaranteed a firm level of social and economic rights to women, even if some were, politically at least, more equal than others" (Korade 1994: 36).

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<sup>178</sup> Salecl (*ibid.*) quotes an example from the women's magazine *Jana*: a family with three children with parents on minimum wage currently gets 21,000 SIT (approximately £ 120) in child benefits. However, if the new law came into effect, from January 1996 the same family would get only 13,600 SIT (approximately £ 71).



## DEBATING WOMEN: SEXISM AND FEMINIST RHETORIC

What's in a name? asks Juliet, who is a woman and knows the tide,  
the ebb and flow, the pull of the real.

(De Lauretis 1987: 51)

The emergence of feminist groups<sup>179</sup> in Slovenia is to a large extent associated with the "pro-democracy" movements that originated in the then northernmost part of Yugoslavia in the early 1980s. A variety of independent groups started questioning the "technologies of power" (cf. Longinović 1994), as well as the foundations of the official (i. e., communist) ideological discourse. As the most important date for the emergence of feminist groups in Slovenia, one should probably take the theoretical supplement of the independent weekly *Mladina* published in March 1985 with several feminist articles (Mirjana Ule in Bahovec 1993a: 122). The emergence of the first independent women's groups immediately followed.

These groups were associated usually with the Socialist Youth organizations (like the ZSMS) or their offshoots, although they had no official ideological (in terms of party politics) platform of their own.<sup>180</sup> Some more radical groups

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<sup>179</sup> Among them still active in the late 1980s and early 1990s were: "Lilith," "Lezbična LL skupina," "Ženska sekcija pri Sociološkem društvu," "SOS telefon za ženske — žrtve nasilja," "Inicijativa," "Prenner klub," "Ženske za politiko," "Ženska inicijativa/Iniziativa delle donne," "Ženske z idejami," and others (cf. Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia et. al. 1992: 45-53, Office for Women's Policy 1995h: 12, 1995f). Several political parties have women's caucuses, but there is no institutional organizing of women MPs. However, it has to be noted that women form 14% of the members of the Slovenian parliament, as well as 22% of the leaders of various parliamentary committees, and they have 15% of elected ministerial posts.

<sup>180</sup> They all shared the emphasis on the heterogeneity and pluralism of discourses, as well as questioning the dominant (political) narratives — gradually endorsing multi-party elections (which happened in Slovenia in 1990). It is interesting to note that the formation of independent women's



(primarily associated with the gay and lesbian movement, like the “LL lesbian group” or “Lilith”) were marginalized even within these early groups,<sup>181</sup> which consisted of mostly middle or upper class well-educated urban women or university students. In an ideological sense, most of these early groups were still constituted within the framework of (then-dominant) Marxist ideology, although more and more tended to see that the problems of inequality did not have to do exclusively with questions of class domination and class struggle.

However, these groups did not readily describe themselves as “feminist.” The notion of feminism implied, throughout the former Yugoslavia, something that was a “dangerous import from the West” (Malešević 1989: 83).<sup>182</sup> This a priori negative attitude in the former Yugoslavia was caused, on the one hand,

by an authoritarian-patriarchal complex of the whole culture and the in-built idea of the “otherness” and the lesser value of women, who were considered incapable of participating in the areas that “naturally” belonged to men. On the other hand, the official antagonism towards feminism as a primarily bourgeois phenomenon has its roots in the pre-war<sup>183</sup> Yugoslav revolutionary movement. The feminists (...) never [theoretically] questioned [the essentials of] the actual [capitalist] political system, despite severely criticizing it in practice.

(Malešević 1989: 84)

Taking all of this into account, it is not very surprising that the official (communist, post-WW II) ideology rejected the feminist movement as something that was not for or from “the people” (Serbian and Croatian: *nenarodno*), and something

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groups happened in Slovenia 10 to 20 years *after* first similar groups were formed in Zagreb (Croatia) and Belgrade (Serbia).

181 Although these groups could (and still can) be contacted through the Student Cultural Center (ŠKUC) in Ljubljana.

182 Neither Miroslava Malešević or Isidora Jarić actually discuss the situation in Slovenia. However, both of their articles are highly relevant for the understanding of gender relations in Slovenia as well, since the basic cultural patterns of what an “appropriate women’s movement” is (Malešević) or what are the ways in which children’s concept of gender roles are constructed (Jarić) *are the same*.

183 WW II, to be exact.

essentially elitist (Malešević, *ibid.*). Therefore, it is no surprise to find the aforementioned hostility and uneasiness about “feminism,” despite the fact that many people (especially women) who feel uncomfortable with the term would not recognize it as coming from the previous dominant narratives. This uneasiness is especially visible in the writings of Jogan and some other authors of the “Marxist” wing of Slovenian feminists. This tradition was based upon the idea that there were no specific “women’s issues” — all the issues had to do with the society as a whole and the injustices within the social sphere (i. e., women should have equal pay for equal work, proper health and child care, etc.). There should be no political organizing of women (cf. the example that Ule quotes in Bahovec 1993a: 121), since it would only muddle up the otherwise clear situation. Consequently, all the problems would be solved when the more general issues related to society as a whole were dealt with.

This situation is even more interesting when one looks at the Slovenian feminists and the traditions that they come from: the “Marxist” wing was incorporated in the official ideological discourses, and there was no official displeasure at the research conducted by them. This factor contributed to an emerging tradition of “women’s clubs” in major political parties. On the other hand, the “psychoanalytical” wing (Bahovec and the authors around the journal *Delta*, Salecl, etc.) was regarded as potentially dangerous and obstructive.<sup>184</sup> Any questioning of the underlying ideological discourses that enabled gender bias was seen as a potential threat for the “official” ideology. Even after the fall of

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<sup>184</sup> Again, I wish to emphasize the *plurality* of feminist discourses: for example, I would regard authors like Zaviršek today as “post-Marxist” — and there are certainly great differences *within* the two influential groups that are mentioned here. On the other hand, there are important authors like Dragica Korade or Mojca Dobnikar who do not easily fit within these categories.

communism in Slovenia, this uneasiness is obviously present, for example in the fact that there are still no established gender studies programs in Slovenian universities.<sup>185</sup>

## FROM POSTER TO SEX AND BACK: THE HIDDEN “FACTOR”

[W]hy do we enjoy watching old movies? Or, better, how do we enjoy them? Well, let us take just a detail: we can discuss whether we like Meryl Streep or not, we can agree or disagree — while Greta Garbo is “beautiful” for everybody; and for always. Why? Because, together with her face, with her figure, we also see the point from which she was, and is, a “fascinating woman.” The gaze for which she is fascinating, the fascinating gaze is now part of her appearance.

(Močnik 1994: 82)

The spring and summer of 1995 were marked by, among other things, a debate about an advertisement for a sun tan lotion: a poster featuring the backsides of five girls in bikinis. The accompanying text was: “Each one has her own factor” (“VSAKA IMA SVOJ FAKTOR”), with the obvious stress that the word “factor” could be interpreted as a different level of sun block protection, as well as (on the other side) stressing a difference between five backsides belonging to different girls in different bikinis. On the other hand, the Slovenian word *faktor* (“factor”) also implies something that puts something into motion. Therefore, the image of five almost naked backsides implies that each one of them has something (i. e., a penis)

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<sup>185</sup> Of course, there are several courses within the area of gender studies (coordinated by Svetlana Slapšak) at the (postgraduate) Institute for Humanistic Studies in Ljubljana. These courses include: History and anthropology of genders, Gender concepts, Feminisms, Women’s rituals, presentations and discourses, and Feminism and psychoanalysis. Unfortunately, the Institute does not have a permanent, long-term source of funding, so it is unclear for how long will it continue to offer these courses.



**Fig. 1** "Each one has her own factor" — the sun tan lotion advertisement.

that would put them "in motion." Therefore, the poster could also read: "Each one has her own *penis*."<sup>186</sup>

It is easy to see why the campaign caused an outrage among some feminist groups, articulated mostly through the Office for Women's Policy. Somewhat surprisingly, the debate about the creation of the "denigrating imagery" of women did not polarize public opinion: I was a little bit surprised to find out (in my interviews as well as in the interviews conducted by the Slovenian media) that both men and women felt largely indifferent towards the ad or just liked it. Some women felt that there was something wrong with it only when specifically asked to elaborate on the image of five female backsides on posters all over the country.

Two things seem to be combined here:

- 1/ The image of five almost naked parts of female anatomy represents something "other" (just an advertisement), different, belonging to a different reality from the one that everyday people live in. In a way, *the image belongs to a different culture*, and as such does not threaten the (actual or perceived) position of women. This is a culture of high paid chief executives, models, actors and actresses, "high culture" which stands apart from what the ordinary people perceive to be "theirs."<sup>187</sup>
- 2/ The obvious fact that there is a gender hierarchy in wider Slovenian society (or, more precisely, *societies*) creates a situation (well known from numerous anthropological examples) in which the sub-dominant group identifies itself through the concepts and discourse of the dominant group (or segment of the society). In this case, women perceive themselves through men's eyes (the sexual symbolism inscribed all over the poster) and see nothing wrong with that. That is the only way in which they are able to see themselves — and that is why criticism coming from women's groups fell on deaf ears.

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<sup>186</sup> The linguistic/cultural overtones were pointed out to me by Vesna Godina.

<sup>187</sup> Of course, this does not imply that the majority of people would regard this "high culture" as non-Slovenian or in any way "foreign" — it just represents "the other" in regard to the norms with which they identify themselves. These can be understood as Baudrillard's "silent majorities."



On the one hand, there is a whole new reality (or hyperreality) being constructed (and actually lived!) here: the reality of men's gaze as something "normal," "natural," or even "neutral." Although this reality is there (in "real life"), its existence is not readily acknowledged — and the majority of women would not agree with this statement. But feminist scholars certainly would. How men see women is "the norm" — *both for men and for women*. On the other hand, the objections to the language and the (sexist) implications of the ad are perceived as belonging to the same "high culture" as the image itself. As such, it is also constructed as "the other" in relation to everyday lives (people did not pay much attention to it prior to the debate anyway), and has no actual relevance to the "lived" (as opposed to perceived) reality. This was clearly correlated to the small minority of people who did have problems with this sun tan poster: the higher one stood on the social level, the more likely it was that she/he would be offended or in some way disturbed by this ad.

On the other hand, the attitudes towards the body are much more liberal in Slovenia than they are in the West<sup>188</sup> — public displays of magazines with naked (female! — it would be interesting to see if the reaction would be the same if some of these naked bodies were male<sup>189</sup>) bodies can be seen all over the country. Pornography was practically liberalized in the late 1980s throughout the former Yugoslavia — so the mere sight of a naked or semi-naked body does not create a public scandal. In fact, it is fair to say that in most cases these images do not draw any attention at all. It is possible that some of the people that approved of the aforementioned advertisement simply did not want to be seen as "backwards" or "stupid" by objecting to five female bodies in g-strings.

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<sup>188</sup> With the important exception of Scandinavian countries, Holland and Denmark.

<sup>189</sup> Although I have to note that the attitudes towards homosexuality are much more liberal than the ones in the UK, for example. Office for Women's Policy is preparing a draft of law which would legalize same-sex marriages — probably within the next few years.



Therefore, feminist critique and feminist discourses in general tend to be perceived as a part of "high culture" as well. Of course, this does create certain problems for the women (feminist scholars and authors) wishing to speak for other women as well (although leading feminist scholars have undoubtedly experienced sexism personally, most of them seem to be well-established professionally, with permanent, full-time teaching posts, etc.) — but they tend to find themselves in opposition to traditional discourses, traditional culture, and traditional prejudices.

In a way, being organized in different groups and different faculties helps the feminist authors reassert their own identity (and establish a kind of "semantic competence," as Rorty [1992] would say). This is still the kind of situation that many Macedonian women intellectuals can only dream of — the public pressures based on the legacy of "feminism" in former Yugoslavia are much stronger there. But the points of reference to ordinary women, to *silent majorities* (Baudrillard 1983), to everyday life (or *lived reality*) are missing. This is where the problem of naming comes in: most of the relatively recent articles and discussions tend to focus on the questions regarding terminology and the methodological problems associated with it (Ule 1988; Zaviršek 1991, 1995; Bahovec 1992; Jalušič 1992: 121 ff, etc.). So what's in a name<sup>190</sup> — as far as some Slovenian feminists are concerned?

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<sup>190</sup> For example, De Lauretis 1987: 51; Shakespeare, *Othello* IV.2; Bahovec 1992: 134; Riley 1988. Eva Bahovec, who is one of the leading Slovenian feminist scholars today, makes references to all three sources on the problem of naming and the whole concept of it in her seminal article. De Lauretis also brings in Umberto Eco and *The Name of the Rose* (1983).

## GENDER, FEMINISM, AND "LIVED REALITY"

She believed that men had it best; even the lowest good-for-nothing had a wife to boss around. And years later I reached the conclusion that she may have been right, although I still cannot imagine myself in a man's body, with hair on my face, a tendency to order people around, and something unmanageable below my navel that, to be perfectly frank, I would not know exactly where to put.

(Allende 1989: 42)

In Slovenia, like anywhere else, feminism is a way of life<sup>191</sup> as much as a way of seeing things, a way of perceiving everyday occurrences. The "everyday occurrences" are quite specific in areas like education and employment, where there is a clear distinction of interests that can be related to gender. To go to some official statistics:<sup>192</sup> in the secondary schools (14-19 olds), 97.7% of the students that take textiles, 91.7% that take social sciences, 90.2% that take education and 85.5% that take medicine as their main subject, are female. Among the most "masculinized" areas in secondary schools are internal affairs (police) with 100%, forestry with 98.4%, electrical engineering and computer science with 97.6%, mining, geology and metallurgy with 97.2% and mechanical engineering with 92.7% male students. When one gets to higher education, the split is also obvious: in the two-year programmes (18-20 year olds) of Medical college (94.9%) and Administrative college (67.7%) the majority of students are female. On the other side, 91.5% of students in the Internal affairs college and 90% in the Technical-security college are male. When it comes to the university-level education, girls tend to figure predominantly in education

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<sup>191</sup> Which does not imply that there is a unified "Slovenian feminist perspective" — as shown above, there are substantial differences between different authors.

<sup>192</sup> The following statistics were compiled by the Office for Women's Policy and published in August 1995.

(86.2%), philosophy (80.8%), social sciences (72.8%), economics (62.9%), medicine (62.1%), and law (60.7%). Male students form the majority in mechanical engineering (97.4%), electrical engineering and computer sciences (95.6%), engineering (81.7%), sport (64%), organisational sciences (59.9%), and theology (59.1%). It is obvious that there clearly are areas distinguished by gender; the more "technical ones" (involving more "scientific" or "exact," "rational" type of knowledge) are for boys, and the more "arty ones" (involving more some kind of a "relational" or "social knowledge"). This almost looks like a dichotomy where girls (being essentially closer to "nature") do not need the "technical knowledge" of the world, but boys (being essentially farther away from "nature") do. Girls are supposed to be "naturally" inclined towards social work (91.8% of the students in the College for Social Work), while boys are supposed to deal with the sciences and more "exact" things.

This kind of constructed dichotomy is then perpetuated in everyday life: it is quite unusual for a girl (or very "unfeminine" — to say the least) to study "masculinized" subjects like mechanical engineering, for example. There are jobs that are automatically considered "feminine" or "masculine," and such a distinction is also stressed in the advertisements when, for example, a job opening for a secretary (a word which can be used in both male and female gender in the Slovenian) is advertised in the female gender only. This is a kind of situation which unites different feminist groups in debates pressing for more equality.

This brings us to the issue of the sexist (or non-sexist) use of language. The analysis of the job advertisements in the daily *Delo* for the six-month periods (January 1 to June 30) in 1988, 1991, 1992 and 1993, shows that only 4.1% of the jobs were advertised using both male and female gender, or a third (neutral) gender form. On the contrary, 88.4% of the jobs were advertised using the male gender only — particularly the ones for the managerial positions, as well as for the jobs that require higher level of education (Office for Women's Policy 1995b: 63). With all

this, one has to bear in mind the relative high proportion of women among the total number of employed (48.4%). A recent debate organized by the Office for Women's Policy (a Government agency founded in 1992, which has an enormous impact in feminist debates, supporting the publication of various books and monographs on gender-related issues, organizing conferences and round tables, etc.) highlighted the differences between the linguists and the feminist scholars (Office for Women's Policy 1995b). Even the question that there is such a thing as a "sexist" use of language was questioned. Then, again, the problem arises of the factual removal of certain segments of population (the majority in Slovenian case) from the theoretical discussions (a great majority of supporters of the "VSAKA IMA SVOJ FAKTOR" ad were women! <sup>193</sup>) in which feminist scholars engage themselves. One can see levels of hyperreality here: the experience of "everyday women" leads to the debates which in turn remain completely incomprehensible to "everyday women." In a sense, they can even reinforce a feeling of a gap between "everyday women" and intellectuals. Like two ships going without navigational equipment across the ocean in a dark and stormy night, the chance of them meeting at some point seems almost accidental.

A sense of hyperreality also exists around the examples of discrimination which are "unofficial." The best example is the practice of some companies (including very important ones, like the "Zavarovalna Triglav") to ask their female employees to sign forms in which they promise that they will not have children.

For example, 32-year old Irena (not her real name), married with a child, well educated (M.A.), working in a health institution was invited for a chat with her boss. They were discussing the new position for which she applied, when the boss said: "Well, if another one was on its way, it wouldn't be that easy?" Irena laughed, not really understanding what he was trying to say, when he said "Well, would it? Will you have another child?" He went on to explain that he did not want her to have any more children, because if she got the new position, in the next few years they would

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<sup>193</sup> I am grateful to Sandra Bašić for pointing this out to me.

need to go on with an important project with very few people involved. After being asked what he specifically wanted her to do, the boss replied that he wanted her to sign a contract promising that she would not have children during the work on the project. Irena knew very well that contracts like these were illegal, but her boss said that while he was well aware that the contract would have no legal value, it would still oblige her morally, so that she could expect some consequences if she broke the contract. She signed the contract and got the job (Doupona Horvat 1995: 8). In some cases, the "contract" is submitted for signature even before the girl starts to work (*ibid.*, p. 9). The fact that these contracts are illegal does not affect their existence. The reality in which they are tolerated exists side by side with the reality in which they are illegal. I was told in November 1995 (by Ms Jasna Jeram from the Office for Women's Policy) that an action is underway to prevent this practice, in coordination with the Workers' Unions. This issue is further complicated by the fact that Slovenia has one of the lowest birth rates in Europe,<sup>194</sup> which in turn serves as an argument of the ultraconservative and anti-abortion groups and political parties. However, the practice of keeping female employees "in check" in this way definitively seems profitable to many companies and small enterprises.

Equality and difference are two key concepts for the understanding of "women's issues" in Slovenia.<sup>195</sup> While men and women are seen (theoretically, in everyday discourses, etc.) as "equal," the fact that they are also "different" becomes obvious when questions related to the family care come into focus.

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<sup>194</sup> According to the data for 1992, there is an average of 1.34 children per woman in Slovenia (since 1992, the number is likely to be even lower). This compares to 2.21 for Iceland, 2.11 for Ireland, 2.09 for Sweden, 1.76 for Denmark and 1.73 for France, for example. The current birth rate in Slovenia is lower than in any other European country, with the exception of Spain (1.23) and Italy (1.25) [Office for Women's Policy 1995a].

<sup>195</sup> According to Darja Zaviršek (personal communication, 1995) many of her students at the College for Social Work do not see the need for any gender-studies-type course because they feel "equal" and they feel that there is nothing that can be added to their notion of "equality."

With the increased urbanization and changes in everyday life ("Westernization" and independence after more than 40 years of communist rule) the concept and the understanding of the family is going through radical changes, and one of the most obvious consequences of these is the problem of violence. Many aspects of family life that were probably just as present in the past are becoming more public with the efforts of women's groups such as "SOS telefon za ženske — žrtve nasilja" ("SOS telephone for women — victims of violence," started in 1989). According to the official police statistics, in 99% of the cases of violence in the family among adults, the victims are women and the perpetrators men (quoted in Zaviršek 1994: 63). In many cases, the perpetrators see nothing wrong with their actions — even in cases of sexual abuse. Violence against women is sometimes seen as the "normal" course of action. This seems very difficult to reconcile with the view that women should be loved and respected, but there seems to be again a kind of "double reality," where apparently totally irreconcilable concepts (violence is wrong/ violence might be acceptable) go side by side. If one compares this situation with the one in less developed societies (such as in the case of Macedonia), it seems that the women are in a somewhat worse position partly because of the loosening of family ties. In the more patriarchal context, women would still be "protected" by members of their own family and kin. In the situation where a significant proportion of income depends on the cooperation of both families (such as working of the *bavcas*, care of domestic animals, etc.), it is mutual cooperation and consent that seem to come first<sup>196</sup> — violence would seem not only wrong, but also completely counterproductive.

It is unfortunate that there are no organized shelters where women victims of violence can come and stay (with their children if they like), and people dealing with them are not sufficiently qualified (cf. Zaviršek 1994: 78). At the same time, the

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<sup>196</sup> Of course, I am talking about the *ideal* circumstances here and generalizing a bit — as mentioned in the chapter on Macedonia, violence against women is a problem there as well.



legal system tends to let the victims down, since victims "must have injuries that would exceed a broken nose, rib, light concussion or teeth knocked out — if they want the perpetrator to be criminally prosecuted" (Zaviršek 1994: 79).

## UNDERSTANDING CONSTRUCTS: GENDER IN EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES

"Happy is the man whose wife is a good cook!"  
(writing on an apron, quoted by Blažič in Office for Women's  
Policy 1995c: 53)

I have shown so far how different images combine in current feminist discourses in Slovenia. The points of view are dependent on one's education and background, as well as on gender. The view that women are the "gentler sex" (until quite recently, the anchorman at the main evening TV news would begin the broadcast with "*Dear female viewers and respected male viewers*"<sup>197</sup>!) goes side by side with instances of domestic violence and maltreatment, and the view that men and women are equal goes side by side with feelings that they are different *biologically* ("How can we be equal? Men can't have babies!"). The biological trap is the most obvious one for the feminist authors who demand more rights based on maternity leave, additional pay etc. and then speak about equality in ideal terms.

What it means to be male and what it means to be female is something that is woven into all levels of education — from kindergarten through to the primary school and later. At a relatively recent round table debate on sexism in the Slovenian

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<sup>197</sup> In Slovenian: "*Drage gledalke in spoštovani gledalci*" (emphasis mine). The example was used by Professor Jože Vogrinc in his paper at the International conference *Democracy and Gender: Question of Gender and Citizenship*, on 9 November 1995, Ljubljana. Cf. also Office for Women's Policy 1995c: 12-15.

language, Milena Blažič pointed out the history of the different approaches to boys and girls in education. In Slovenia, this can be traced as far back as 1842 (in the Slomšek Reader for the Sunday Schools). The pattern in which boys are encouraged to be assertive, self-confident, overt, and aggressive — while girls are supposed to be quiet, obedient, accommodating, and gentle can also be traced through the elementary school readers of Slovenian language published in 1909 and 1910. The most stunning thing for Ms Blažič, however, was that the same pattern was replicated in the 1992 reader<sup>198</sup> for 8 and 9-year olds.

The book is divided in two parts: for the girls, Mojcas, <sup>199</sup>*I shall become a famous princess today* [*Danes bom slavna princeska postala*], while the second part is entitled *The knight is coming* [*Vitez na obisku*], for Andrejs (...). The first part contains primarily stories where the main characters are girls: Sanjas, Nokas, Veronikas, Špelas, animals like goats and squirrels, stories like *I am more beautiful* (...). The second part is for Andrej, a brave knight. Almost exclusively boys appear here: Jan, Janko, Martin Krpan, Peter Klepec, Brkonja Čeljustnik, Drejček and three Martians (...).

(Milena Blažič in Office for Women's Policy 1995c: 21; footnote added)

As noted elsewhere, and using the same example:

There are twice as many fairy tales in the first part [of the book] as in the second [one], there is more on sleeping and dreaming, it seems that the objects of the real world and their treatment are somehow more becoming for boys, in the second part. Taking the two parts together, there is half as much on female professions in comparison to male [ones], and a more elaborate analysis would show a whole range of other differences and contestable details (...).

(Drglin and Vendramin 1993: 56; cf. also Drglin in Bahovec 1993a: 153-154)

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<sup>198</sup> This is a third-grade reader which is used throughout the country.

<sup>199</sup> Mojca and Andrej are very common names for girls and boys, respectively.



**Fig. 2** Illustrations for the two parts of the First Reader; for Mojcas (left) and Andrejs (right). After Bahovec 1996: 110.

This corresponds to the view by several authors (Drglin, Vendramin, Bahovec, Ule) of the deeply embedded sexism present in the school system. It is almost as if “anything goes” where the boys are concerned. (“He is supposed to be naughty! He’s a boy!”) In several cases, boys would refuse to read from the first part of the above mentioned reader: “I won’t read that! That is for girls!” But they are able to get away with it.

Teachers tend to encourage boys much more than girls. As a result, girls tend to feel less confident in themselves, even when they actually show better results and get better marks. According to Zalka Drglin (in Bahovec 1993a: 146), there are no obvious gender stereotypes on the level of the “official” curriculum. However, she claims that there is a “hidden curriculum,” which incorporates all the mechanisms of gender stereotyping and gender-based segregation. These are easy to measure and prove, as seen in the previous example, so there is clearly a possibility for these elements of the “hidden curriculum” to get into the “official” one.

In her quantitative analysis of the readers for Slovenian elementary schools (2nd to 8th grade; ages 6 or 7 to 14 or 15), Alja Roš<sup>200</sup> showed that, for example, in the 7th grade Slovenian reader there are 147 male characters depicted in some public context — as opposed to only 18 female ones! In the 8th grade there are 117 male ones and only 6 female ones. In all the readers used in the school year 1992/93 there are 265 males depicted in some public activity (or profession) and only 36 female ones (Jogan in Renner, Potočnik and Kozmik 1995: 53). It is interesting to note that the situation actually gets worse after the 1st grade, where of all the characters depicted there are two thirds males and one third females (in percentages, 66.7 and 33.3, respectively). In the 8th grade, the percentage is 86.2 for the male ones and 13.8 for the female ones (Jogan in Renner, Potočnik and Kozmik 1995: 54).

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<sup>200</sup> This was her Diploma Thesis, *Sexism in School Textbooks* [Seksizem in šolskih učbenikih] defended in 1993 at the Faculty of the Social Sciences (FDV) in Ljubljana. Unfortunately, I did not have access to this thesis, so I refer to Maca Jogan (in Renner, Potočnik and Kozmik 1995: 49-63).

In the present context, I think that it would be useful to compare the data from other parts of former Yugoslavia where similar research has been done.<sup>201</sup>

For example, Isidora Jarić did a study of the gender-related imagery in Serbian textbooks. In the illustrations for the First Reader, male characters appear 61 times, while female ones appear 27 times. In terms of percentages, women are almost always depicted in the context of the family (55.6% — compared to 14.8% for men), while men appear much more often in a professional context (44.3% — compared to 3.7% for women). No women are even mentioned as “historical” figures. The number of illustrations where a man is the main or the only character depicted is 35 — compared to 19 where a woman is the main character. As noted by Jarić: “a great majority of female characters are actually hidden in the group illustrations, where they serve more as decoration or to fill a gap than some concrete function” (1994: 107). Illustrations where children are depicted always show boys as playing football or playing in the woods — while the ones depicting girls always have them performing some work: feeding chickens, or going shopping with mother. There are no illustrations in the book that would depict several women doing something together — implying that women are not very sociable and that they do not socialize with each other (*ibid.*, pp. 107-108).

The images of girls promote *responsibility* (they finish their homework on time), *cuteness* (they smile much more often than boys), *clumsiness where sports are concerned* (there are very few girls in the illustrations depicting sport events<sup>202</sup>), and *complete technical ineptness* (boys sit and work on computers, girls just watch them) [Jarić 1994: 108].

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<sup>201</sup> Comparisons between Macedonia on the one hand and Slovenia and Serbia on the other had been done (Gjurovska 1991: 5), as well as between Slovenia on the one hand and other parts of the former Yugoslavia (for example, by Ule in Bahovec 1993a).

<sup>202</sup> There are 56 male characters involved actively in the sports events — compared to only 3 female ones. In the readers for older children, sport becomes exclusively a domain for boys.

Family-related imagery is strictly dichotomous: father and son on the one side, mother and daughter on the other. *There are no depictions of father and daughter or mother and son.* Boys are depicted studying or engaged in some sort of an intellectual activity (like playing chess with the father), or studying the world around them (father and son fishing)... On the other hand, girls and mothers are depicted in a very passive way, sitting or standing, and overall looking like little more than mere ornaments (*ibid.*, p. 109).<sup>203</sup>

In the analysis of Serbian-language readers, Jaric points out that there are two and a half times more male characters than female ones. Female characters tend to be depicted more in terms of immediate family members or kin (p. 110). In the readers for grades 5 to 8 (for 10-15 year olds), the percentage of male characters is 59.3. While there is approximately the same number of males depicted in some professional setting (usually something that has to do with the military) as the ones without work, with females the ratio tends to be three to one in favor of ones without work (30 compared to 11).

The analysis of texts displays a very similar structure of gender-related differences: there are 84.64% of male characters and 15.35% of female characters. Boys are depicted as the main characters in stories four times more than girls (28.16% compared to 7.04%); and the same proportion goes for the adults: men are the main characters in 41.78% of the texts, and women in only 10.79%. Women still tend to be depicted mostly as nameless "faces in the crowd." When the depictions of family are concerned, there is an obvious emphasis on male children as the "preferred ones," whose birth will cause celebration and gifts (p. 115). There is no cause for celebration or gifts when a girl is born — the only thing worse seems to be not having children at all.

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<sup>203</sup> This kind of family portrait slightly changes in the later readers, but still, there is not a single depiction of a father and daughter together, representing "family!"



It is obvious, then, how a certain type of imagery tends to be constructed and then reproduced. In the Slovenian context (cf. Drglin in Bahovec 1993a, Drglin and Vendramin 1993), teachers of *both sexes* accept these stereotypes as the “norm.”

Insofar as anthropology tries to approach these questions in a specific social and cultural context, it can be very helpful for the understanding of reproduction of gender-based and gender-related stereotypes. There is both a question (already mentioned above) of the sub-dominant group accepting the discourse of a dominant group and “modelling” its behavior on the expectations projected by the dominant group. But there is also a widespread belief that things “have always been this way” — so the way to change them would be to point out the potential different or alternative approaches. A lot of this has to do with education, but there is also a possibility that this might create a gap between the educated (usually, university-level or higher) and the uneducated. The question of the connection between gender studies and anthropology comes into focus as well — both areas are quite marginalized in Slovenia, despite the fact that there are some very good recent articles that establish a connection between them (Ule in Bahovec 1993a; Zaviršek 1991, 1995; Zaviršek in Bahovec 1993a). In 1995, *Delta*, the first Slovenian journal for women’s studies and feminist theory was started with Eva Bahovec as the editor. Besides being influenced by contemporary psychoanalytical theory, the journal also publishes articles that take a point of view that I would describe as “anthropological”: taking into account and situating the constructs based on gender as well as putting them in the specific cultural context. But still, much remains to be done in this area. The interest is definitively there, as will become more clear in the next chapter, with the study of the Slovenian Maternity Leave Law and the debates that issues related to family generate.

In this chapter, I have tried to outline the current gender-related debates in Slovenia, with examples ranging from the TV debates to advertising (the poster campaign for sun tan lotion) and educational discourses. In one of the next chapters

("Writing gender"), I will give more examples of attitudes towards the body — these attitudes seem to be an important part of contemporary consumer culture. I have used the statistical data whenever possible to corroborate and emphasize the views that were expressed to me in my interviews and observations. The use of statistical data also provides for a more balanced segment of the population,<sup>204</sup> since most of my meetings were with feminist authors and scholars. It can be seen that most debates about gender revolve around the notion of difference as well as other concepts that are culturally constructed. At the same time, just like in the previous chapter, I have tried to present the situation in a somewhat broader context, with references to the studies in neighboring regions (Serbia), as well as the legacy of the attitudes towards feminism derived from Yugoslavia's recent communist past.

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<sup>204</sup> Of course, *no two statistical samples are identical* — so some of the differences in answers must be attributed to differences between the samples!

# Gender, identity and rights:

## Mothers, fathers and the rest in Slovenia

The family also holds some of the keys to our future as a nation. Should families cease to produce enough children as some demographers, historians and politicians have already claimed with alarm, should couples break up and teenagers harass people in the streets, then the state will look for ways and means of setting the family on a path with less disastrous significance for the future, and at a lower social cost.

(Segalen 1986: 1)

## INTRODUCTION: "THE GREAT SMLL DEBATE"

Public discourse dominated by nationalist ideologies and often sanctified by the church defines the family as the basis of the ethnic or wider national group, and gives it, and women as mothers within it, a mission in the name of that community. The overburdened worker-mothers of state socialism have become the revered mothers of newly nationalist democracies.

(Einhorn 1993: 7)

In this chapter, I intend to focus more on questions of identity and difference in Slovenia. Taking as a starting point the proposed changes to the Slovenian Maternity Leave Law,<sup>205</sup> I shall point to some of the similarities that all the newly emerging (post-1989) states in East Central Europe share with Slovenia. I try to provide some historical background to the debates regarding the "proper" place of women in society. The family and the issues related to it provide an interesting opportunity to see *how men and women see each other*. Also, questions like what is the "essence" of "manhood" or "womanhood" can be approached from this perspective. While there are some dichotomies (primarily based on biology) that appear to be false, there is at least one (between the public and the private sphere, or politics and family) that is really present and whose consequences are being felt. While this dichotomy was analyzed relatively recently by some Slovenian feminists (Ule, Ferligoj and Renner 1990), recent economic and political developments make a situation somewhat comparable to the one in the East Central European countries. Finally, I will concentrate on some historical data<sup>206</sup> that show how discourses

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<sup>205</sup> The first information about this was provided to me by Dr. Tanja Renner. I am most grateful to Alenka Švab for giving me a copy of her M.A. thesis, where the issues surrounding the Slovenian Maternity Leave Law are discussed in greater detail.

<sup>206</sup> I am aware that examples such as the medieval commune of Piran might seem to take the discussion too far (at least in time), but my aim is to show how gender related discourses refer to

claiming that what is today considered an “essence” of being male or female (and acting accordingly) and as deeply rooted in tradition, are actually a relatively recent construction.

On 24 December 1994, three members of the Slovenian Parliament<sup>207</sup> proposed some changes to the Work Relations Law — more specifically, to the part which covers maternity leave and leave granted for the care of children. Following Alenka Švab (1995, 1996a)<sup>208</sup>, I will refer to this proposal and to this part of the Work Relations Law as the Slovenian Maternity Leave Law (SMLL).

As the proponents of change put it, Article 80 of the Slovenian Work relations Law stipulates that the (female) worker<sup>209</sup> is guaranteed 365 days as a maternity leave: 105 days before and 260 days after the childbirth. Taking into account the fact that fewer children are born in Slovenia every year (in 1979: 30,604; in 1984: 26,274; in 1990: 22,638; in 1993: 19,982), and that this actually endangers physical survival of the Slovenian nation (Office for Women’s Policy 1995a: 8),<sup>210</sup> the following changes to the Article 80<sup>211</sup> were proposed:

- 1/ That the leave for the care of a child should last 36 months instead of 105 days; and
- 2/ That instead of taking the leave, mother or father would work part-time until a child is 65 months old.

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different times and places. I also hope to show that the notion of *complementarity* which anthropologists have noted for the South European/Mediterranean societies (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991; Milicic 1995; Herzfeld 1987) is not just a recent anthropological invention.

<sup>207</sup> They are: Nada Skuk, Miroslav Mozetič, and Štefan Kociper from the Christian Democrat party.

<sup>208</sup> For the translation of the SMLL (based on Švab 1995), see the Appendix.

<sup>209</sup> In Slovenian: *delavka*.

<sup>210</sup> The phrase “physical survival of the Slovenian nation” was not actually used by the MPs proposing the changes. They point to the fact that for the “renewing of population” (in Slovenian: “*za obnavljanje prebivalstva*”) at least 30,000 children need to be born every year.

<sup>211</sup> For the translation of the relevant Articles of this law, see Appendix.

In effect, the proposed changes were supposed to influence positively both the Slovenian population policy and (by extending the maternity leave) the employment situation (since Slovenia, like many other post-communist countries, faces problems connected with the transition of the economy). The reasoning went as follows: if women would just take care of the children, they would at the same time “free” additional working places. Therefore, the proposed changes were supposed to contribute both to the physical survival (and regeneration) of the Slovenian nation, and, at the same time, to its economic well-being. In a situation that can be related to Anastasia Karakasidou’s paper “Women of the family, women of the nation,” it was (again) the women that were supposed to bring “better times” for the whole nation.<sup>212</sup> The role of mothers was to be extended to the whole of society — by taking care of the young, they were contributing to the society’s future; by vacating jobs (while taking care of the young), they were contributing to its present.

A young Slovenian scholar, Nataša Djurić, pointed out in her Diploma Thesis some of the images of women in fascist and Nazi discourses. These images are strangely similar to the ones demanding that women find their “proper place” in the kitchen and, especially, through children. This imagery is readily associated with some of the most oppressive social and political systems in human history.<sup>213</sup> For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, Mussolini raised taxes for the single people and childless couples, and instituted money rewards for every new child. “The more children, the better,” was the message, and it was considered particularly convenient if families would have more than four children — since in that case it was assumed that they (the children) would also be healthier. “Fertile” mothers were especially highly regarded — just before the 1937 New Year, 95 largest families in Italy were awarded money prizes and special medals (Djurić in Bahovec 1993a: 60).

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<sup>212</sup> Cf. Also Einhorn 1993: 221-224.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Einhorn 1993: 9 and Chapter 3 for the situation in East Central Europe. Serbian nationalists have also recently called upon the mothers to bear more children (Einhorn 1993: 105).



Following some of the arguments and examples that the late Wilhelm Reich used in his brilliant *Mass Ideology of Fascism*, Djurić also traces the identification of motherland with mother. In these discourses, mothering is seen as the main function of the woman, and the image of woman as a mother and protector is subsequently projected onto the state. This protector then has its “chosen representatives”—for example, when Hitler was asked when he intended to get married, he replied: “I am already married. My wife is Germany” (quoted by Djurić in Bahovec 1993a: 62). The strength of a nation is judged by, among other things, the number of its inhabitants. As a result of this, any proposals that might reduce the number of inhabitants (and anything dealing with birth control and reproductive rights of women!) can be regarded as hostile to the well-being of a nation. And nationalists are always quick to point this out.<sup>214</sup>

Like many other post-communist (or post-socialist) countries, Slovenia faced an upsurge of nationalism just before and shortly after its independence. “Slovenia to Slovenians!” was the battle cry of some of the most ardent nationalists, but also of different political groups and organizations that tried to put a distance between themselves and (especially in the late 1980s) the federal Yugoslav authorities. In many cases, former communists suddenly became nationalists (sometimes literally overnight) — claiming that they had always been “on the right track.” On the one hand, this was made easier by the fact that in the ethnically mixed SFR Yugoslavia, the (then) Socialist Republic of Slovenia was the most ethnically homogenous (around 87% of its population declared themselves as Slovenian at the 1991 census, now the percentage is over 90). On the other hand, however, even before independence (June 25, 1991) Slovenia was faced for some time with the very slow increase or even decline in the number of its inhabitants. An almost chronic shortage

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<sup>214</sup> Barbara Einhorn points at the fact that when the newly emerging states of East Central Europe started modifying and changing their legal systems, reproductive rights were very high on the list of priorities that needed to be erased from the recent communist past. In fact, they were second only to reversing the abolishment of private property.

of semi-skilled and unskilled workers influenced migration from other, less developed parts of Yugoslavia (especially Bosnia and Herzegovina), a fact that contributed to the creation of an “underclass” which gradually started incorporating itself into “mainstream” Slovenian society. The intermarrying worried some of the ardent nationalists (although in reality, children from ethnically mixed marriages or “guest workers” account for a tiny fraction of a population), who were even then being worried about the ethnic and cultural “purity” of the Slovenian nation. The belief that things could only get better after the fall of communism did not quite materialize for a considerable proportion of population. Therefore, scapegoats had to be found.

The scapegoats became all the people and groups identified as the “Other.”<sup>215</sup> “Otherness” in this context meant everything that was not in a positive way (positive defined by nationalists and the “healthy forces”<sup>216</sup> that stood for the newly emerging society) contributing to the new country and its well-being, and people that supported birth control (most of the laws were inherited from the communist period [1945-1990 in Slovenia]) found themselves suddenly as the “Others.” Birth control and rights of women as already defined meant in “reality” (everyday life, especially where Slovenia is concerned) less children. This, in turn, meant both that the “purity” of the nation is going to be polluted by the increasing proportion of children of “guest workers” (or children of mixed marriages between Slovenians and non-Slovenians, which for the nationalists accounted for the same thing), and, more importantly, that

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<sup>215</sup> Cf. the Hungarian historian István Rév, who analyzed the East Central Europeans’ need to define themselves “by right of birth” as “insiders,” thus providing what he calls “post-Communist national identity” which “has a constant need for the ‘Other,’ the ‘enemy’ who can be held responsible for past and present hardships” (Einhorn 1993: 8).

<sup>216</sup> The phrase “healthy forces” was used during the communist era to describe all the people and groups within the society that approved of the official ideology and accepted it without any hesitation or questioning. On the opposite end of the spectrum stood a handful of dissident students, artists and intellectuals, ready to question dominant discourses, but they were totally marginalized (as the subsequent events after the break-up of Yugoslavia showed) by the “healthy forces.”

the physical survival of the whole nation was in danger. This is an important background for looking at gender/family-oriented issues in the public discourses, and it became especially prominent (not overtly, of course) during the “SMLL debate.”

The belief that women’s primary (“natural”) role is to be mothers is obvious among the legislators (one of whom is a woman) who suggested the change. In the debate that followed this proposal, it emerged that the majority of people who supported the changes were mostly oriented towards right-wing parties like the Christian Democrats (SKD) or the National Party (SNS) (*Office for Women’s Policy* 1995a: 40). Some of the articles and commentaries most bitterly denouncing the criticisms of the proposed changes were published in the National Party’s official newspaper, *Slovenec*.<sup>217</sup> Their message was clear: women do have a place in the family — and that place is with children. This opinion is especially prevalent among the non-urban population. In general, as well as in the public opinion polls, the predominant views were quite different.

In public opinion polls, it emerged that 41.7% of the respondents thought that extending the maternity leave to three years would have an adverse effect on the employment opportunities of women, especially younger ones (as opposed to 19.7% who thought that it might have a positive effect). When asked about the possibilities for promotion, 50.9% thought that the proposed changes would have a negative effect on women — as opposed to just 7.9% who thought that it might have a positive effect (*Office for Women’s Policy* 1995a: 13).<sup>218</sup> On the other hand, according to another opinion poll,<sup>219</sup> only a slight majority of the respondents (45.8% as opposed to 44.9%) were *against* the extension of the maternity leave. Doctors suggested that the ideal maternity leave would be 18 months, and most people had no problem with the idea of extending it to two years. So, while a significant proportion of the population

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<sup>217</sup> Extensive extracts from the debate — especially regarding the articles and opinions published in daily newspapers — were published in *Office for Women’s Policy* 1995a.

<sup>218</sup> The poll was conducted by the agency *Varianta* between 6 and 8 January 1995.

<sup>219</sup> This opinion poll was published in a daily *Delo* on 4. February 1995.

believed that the status of women regarding maternity leave should be improved, they also (in most cases) disagreed with the way(s) in which the changes were proposed.

I used the phrase "status of women" quite intentionally — even though the SMLL is supposed to refer to both men and women. The connection between women and parenthood in general is implicit throughout the law. As a matter of fact, according to the data from December 1994, out of 15,631 individuals using this leave, only 77 (0.49%) were fathers! According to the young Slovenian researcher Alenka Švab, although the SMLL does offer a possibility for leave for men as well, this is presented in such a way that it actually indicates exceptional circumstances, and not something that can (and should) be a part of everyday practice.

This is done by placing the article about this possibility at the [very] end of the chapter. Therefore, the form of the law itself imposes the possibility that men (fathers) take child care leave as very rare and exceptional and thus imposes child care on mothers.

How deeply the role of mother is perceived not only as biologically grounded but also as closely linked to child care is seen in the use of two different formulations: the optional care taker (father) is mentioned as WORKER-father, while mother is mentioned as MOTHER-worker, emphasising stereotyped images of man's work role (worker) and woman's role as a mother.<sup>220</sup>

(Švab 1996a: 8-9, footnote added)

Svab continues by pointing out that "[t]he content of the article which deals with father's child care leave is also shaped in a way that [implies that] fathers are supposed to take child care leave only in exceptional cases." These cases are: mother's death, mother leaving the child, or mother being temporary or permanently incapable "for independent life and work."

This [also] appears to be discriminating, since it implies that it is the mother who has to be capable for independent life and work, by which [the adjective] 'independent' further [implies] that men are not

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<sup>220</sup> See also Einhorn 1993: 5, 40.

supposed to be involved in child care. The whole article is structured and defined according to the concept of mother-worker: men can take child care leave only on the basis of a previous agreement with mother, [or] when she cannot realise the role of child caring, which has been ["naturally" or "biologically"] ascribed to her.

(Švab 1996a: 9)

Some of the stereotypical images of *what does it mean to be a woman* are very obvious here. The dichotomy nature/culture is clearly superimposed onto the female/male one. The primary task of men is socialization, while women should take care of the children — except in very special and very specific circumstances. Men are supposed to be “public,” while women are supposed to be “private.”

However, as I will show in the next section, there are also dichotomies that seem to be constructed *by both women and men* quite consciously — and at least one of these dichotomies (public/private) is a very important contributing factor to what many women see as real emancipation.

## “TIE ME UP, TIE ME DOWN”: FAMILY TIES AND FEMINIST DISCOURSES

What is a family? A group of people which is connected in a legal way into a system of marital and kin ties and in a certain way does a certain mutual (group) work.

(Bogdan Lešnik in Renner, Potočnik and Kozmik 1995: 11)

As Martine Segalen pointed out in her excellent book *Historical Anthropology of the Family*, there are conflicting and mutually exclusive ways in which one regards the “family.” On the one hand, the media “echo the same clichés and talk of the ‘disintegrating family’, ‘the weakening of the family’, ‘state aid for the family’, ‘the family at risk’ (...), stressing the link between the idea of family and the notion of crisis” (Segalen 1986: 1). The contemporary Western family is “a unit of consumption rather than of production,” fewer people are regarded as part of the family, it has become a refuge from the outside world. On the other hand, of course, it can be seen as the place where our true emotional potentials are fulfilled, as the focus of numerous emotions that we are unable to express in a dehumanized society (Segalen 1986: 2). The same patterns can be observed in some societies outside Western Europe.

For most people in Slovenia (as well as in Macedonia and in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe) the notion of family automatically implies something nice, stable and comfortable. A place where one is “safe” — where nothing bad can happen. This almost provides the concept of the family with some mythical qualities (in the Eliadean sense of *illud tempus*, the great time — now long gone — where everything was just the way it should be) that almost automatically imply other comforting concepts like the cradle, security and love. There is also a sense that things were somehow much better in the past, that it is only in the hectic world that



we live in that one can talk about the "crisis of the family" and the crisis of the "family values" (the second one being also an important canvassing slogan for many conservative and neo-conservative politicians).

Of course, as pointed by the sociologist Tanja Renner, studies into the concept and structure of the family show that this image is very much idealized and distorted. For example, family life in the past was very far from stable or static, and people in the past lived in numerous and very different forms of family. The average family size in Europe has hardly changed since the 16th century.<sup>221</sup> To come closer to Slovenia, a number of single people and what Renner calls "reorganized families" (in Slovenian: *reorganizirane družine*)<sup>222</sup> was quite high between 1550 and 1850. In the 17th century, 30% of all the inhabitants of what is today Slovenia lived alone, and 50% of all the families were "reorganized families." In the same period, the average length of marriage was only half of what it is today.<sup>223</sup> Finally, there is no historical evidence that the dark sides of family life like violence, neglect, alcoholism, sexual abuse and the like were less common in the past than they are today (Renner, Potočnik and Kozmik 1995: 17).

Of course, "classical" patriarchal discourses are at work where the family is concerned. For example, when presented (in 1991) with the statement "The role of man in marriage is to provide money, the role of woman is to take care of the household and the family," 44.4% male and 36.8% of female respondents agreed, while 35% of male and 44.2% of female respondents disagreed. Answers to the same

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<sup>221</sup> For example, the average size of the family in England before the industrial revolution was 4.7 people.

<sup>222</sup> This would include families where one or both partners have been divorced, same-sex partners, separated couples, as well as single-parent families. I do not know what the legal situation is now, but up until 1991 some of the issues regarding families were legally regulated comparatively well throughout the former Yugoslavia. For example, children born outside marriage had all the same legal rights as the ones born in marriage, and unmarried couples living together were legally equal to the ones that were married.

<sup>223</sup> For the exact references, see Renner, Potočnik and Kozmik 1995: 17.

question in 1993 were slightly different; 41.5% males and 38.4% females agreed, while 38.5% males and 45.9% females disagreed. The gap between the percentage of male respondents who agree and the ones who disagree is much smaller, and there are more women who would disagree with the above statement. These changes occurred over the period of only two years, and there are several possible explanations for this.

There is a possibility that there is simply an increased awareness and radicalization of women, and that it simply begins to show at a certain moment. It still remains to be seen whether this trend will continue or not. But there is also a possibility that people *respond* differently from the way in which they would *act* in their own life: Jogan quotes an example of a public opinion poll conducted in mid-1980s in West Germany, where 80% of male respondents agreed with the statement that "Man should work, woman should stay at home." However, only 44% would *personally* wish that in their own family situation (Rener, Potočnik and Kozmik 1995: 55).

Another very important point to be made is the omnipresence of the "men's gaze"<sup>224</sup> and its influence (already demonstrated above in the case of the sun tan lotion advertisement); a public opinion poll in 1992 registered 72.1% men and 68.2% women who were very much in agreement with the statement "It is OK for women to work, but what they really like the most is home and children." Only 17.2% male and 24.8% female respondents disagreed. When the same question was asked at the end of the next year (1993), 59.8% male and 62.5% female respondents strongly agreed, while 19.7% men and 18.8% women disagreed.

According to these numbers women seem to be less inclined towards the changing of the "traditional" ("patriarchal") picture, than men. Or is it another syndrom of the changing attitudes of the "man of the 90s"? Jogan sees the potential answer in the "recatholicization" and "repatriarchalization" that is sweeping Slovenia

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<sup>224</sup> See Močnik 1994: 82, quoted in the previous chapter. The gaze that Močnik mentions is actually "men's gaze" only!

after independence (Rener, Potočnik and Kozmik 1995: 56). I think that part of the reason lies in the feelings of insecurity brought by the economic and political changes: in a world that seems much less certain and much more fragile than it used to be, "the family" is seen as an ideal, as a place which is "safe" from the horrors of the outside world, and therefore offers enough protection in these turbulent times. Although this idealized image never corresponded to what "families" used to be like in Slovenia (or probably anywhere else, for that matter), this projection is a very powerful symbol.

Still, in the 1992 opinion poll, 54% men and 64.6% women disagreed with the statement that when it is difficult to get a job, men should have an advantage over women. 32.9% men and 23.5% women agreed. It is interesting to compare these numbers with the reply to the question "Do you think that a woman has to have a child in order to have a meaningful life?", where 49.5% men and 58.6% women thought that having a child does fulfill "the essence" of woman's life (while 43.9% male and 35.9% female respondents thought that it was not really necessary). More women than men (15.7% to 14.4%) agreed with the statement that pre-school child will probably be at a disadvantage if its mother is employed. On the similar lines, more men than women (51.3% to 44.5%) disagreed.

So, one might ask, what is wrong? Are Slovenian women more for the "family+children" ideal than their male counterparts? More than two thirds of the respondents (69.6% men and 66.5% women) agreed with the statement that "Overall, the family suffers if a woman works full-time" (Jogan in Rener, Potočnik and Kozmik 1995: 56-57).

The proponents of the changes in the Maternity Leave Law (as well as the ones who would claim that a proper place for a woman is at home, with children) would claim that these data empirically support the notion that there is a dilemma that the population faces: full-time work or family. However, when it comes to absolute priorities in life, the same percentage of female respondents (96.9) regards *both* work

and family as “very or most important” (the numbers for men are quite similar: 96.9% regard work and 95.5% family as “very or most important”). So, in practice, it seems that people go for *both* family *and* work — believing that they could and should be compatible.

It is interesting to note that in another opinion poll, conducted only among young people,<sup>225</sup> aspirations both to have a family and to work seem to be shared. The “classical” division of work in the family (father secures money, mother takes care of the children) was rejected by 83.7% of the respondents. Sharing of work at home equally was supported by 73.6%, and the right to an abortion by 82.5% of the respondents.<sup>226</sup> Everyone wanted to work, 79.3% wanted to have children (47.5% wanted to have two children, 31.8% three or more). However, a great majority of the respondents also expressed the belief that the society should be able to provide economical and social opportunities for their future (housing, childcare, reduced working hours, etc.) (Rener in Office for Women’s Policy 1995c: 17-19).

On the other hand, and in the opinion polls among all the segments of the population, the “family+children” formula seems to be more present in the minds of men; 44.6% men and 36.1% women agreed with the statement that “It is just as fulfilling for a woman to be a housewife as it is to work full-time.” 24.4% men and 35% women disagreed — so there is a clear gender division here. Also, more women than men (24.8% to 16.4%) strongly agreed with the statement that “the best way for a woman to be independent is to work full-time” (26.3% men and 19.9% women disagreed). In the 1993 opinion poll, slightly less people strongly agreed with the same statement (13% men and 20.4% women). Women were more in favor than men

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<sup>225</sup> The opinion poll “Youth ’95” was conducted last year among 1830 students of the universities in Ljubljana and Maribor.

<sup>226</sup> Even the opposition to abortion should be seen in a specific context: several women that I talked with who were against abortion were strongly opposed to the state regulating this matter. They thought that if other women want to have an abortion, they are wrong, but it is their right to be wrong.

of both husband and wife financially contributing to the family (50.9% to 40.2% “strongly agree”).

One could ask, how come so many women agree with the statement that their “proper” place is at home and with children? Is this just a sign of pervasive androcentrism and reestablishment of the patriarchal values that the communist system for such a long time kept “in check”? I believe that the answers to this are not as simple or straightforward. More importantly, this can be seen in light of what Einhorn (1993, especially Chapter 4) describes as the institution of the “double burden” for women in the (former) socialist (communist) countries.

It was considered “normal” and therefore “expected” from women to be “there” and to pick up their “proper” duties — *both* in the workplace and in the family. Above all, it was the sure sign of their *emancipation*. By refusing this “double” (or even “triple” — in cases where women went<sup>227</sup> into politics) burden, women in Slovenia (just like in other East Central European countries<sup>228</sup>) are finally demanding a voice and clearly expressing their opinion. To put it in simple terms: they see as their right to stay home if they want to. The return to “family values” in this context also signifies a return to emancipatory discourses.

A good example of this overburdening is the case study of 86 women in chief executive or chief managerial positions in Slovenia, conducted in 1989/1990. The study clearly showed that the image of “career woman,” who pursues her professional interests and leaves everything behind *has nothing to do with reality*. All these women had was an additional strain and pressure — being in positions of leadership,

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<sup>227</sup> Or were just delegated — mostly through the system of quotas.

<sup>228</sup> This geographical determination is a bit vague. Although Slovenians generally consider themselves to be a Central European nation, they would *never consider themselves to be an East European nation* — “East European” being identified (until 1989) as “pro-Soviet” and actually part of the Warsaw Pact. Most people from the former Yugoslavia consider them being referred to as “East Europeans” as an insult. It is interesting that Einhorn does mention (but only mention) Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia in her book, although some of her data (especially on the emergence of women’s groups in former Yugoslavia) are extremely inadequate and incomplete.



they were supposed to prove themselves “worthy” of it (perhaps even more than their male colleagues). At the same time, they had to prove (to both the men and the women they were working with!) that they were “real women” — that they take care of the home and children (Ule, Ferligoj and Renner 1990: 71-72).

Although Barbara Einhorn’s book *Cinderella Goes to Market* does mention Slovenia only very briefly (as well as several other countries that emerged after the fall of communism and as a result of the dissolution of SFR Yugoslavia), the situation there certainly can be compared to the trends that were (and are?) present in what used to be East Germany, what used to be Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland.<sup>229</sup> In these countries, Einhorn claims, women are more than happy to get rid of the extra “burdens” and make choices that they think their “sisters” in the West always had.<sup>230</sup> By doing this, they leave issues like politics and economics (including questions dealing with employment) to men, while they tend to retreat into the “private” domain. In this way, a dichotomy is posited between what many women see as “dirty” or “tainted” — the public sphere of politics and capitalism (male)<sup>231</sup> on the one hand, and the “pure” private sphere of home and family (female). During my stay in Slovenia, I was never in a situation where women would spontaneously start

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<sup>229</sup> Two countries mentioned here (Czechoslovakia and East Germany) “used to be” — but not any more. This is another *hyperreal* point that one can make about the world we live in.

<sup>230</sup> She also points to the differences between Western feminist discourses and the realities of East Central European countries. For Western feminists, the private sphere was considered to be the main factor in a constant disadvantaging of women and undervaluation of their work (since housework including care of the children is not paid, it is therefore less valid than paid work — the domain of men, in the public sphere). While Western feminists frequently asked for the enablement for women to leave the constraints of the private sphere and enter into the area where things “really matter,” the public sphere (where power and politics are located, among other things), the reality of many women in the newly emerging countries is that they are more than happy in the private sphere. For them, it is there that the really important issues really happen and it is there that they feel most in power or in control to influence what seem the most important things (cf. Einhorn 1993: 6 and Chapter 2).

<sup>231</sup> Einhorn mentions that in countries that she studied the number of women in parliaments fell from around one third under the communist regime (largely based on quotas) to less than one tenth in the newly emerging societies (1993: 10).



discussing politics!<sup>232</sup> This is quite unusual and untypical for the part of the world where everyone has something to say about the way that the country (or community) is run, where most jokes have political overtones (or are about specific political personalities), and where the media are generally inundated with politics, political scandals and the like.

By postulating this public/private dichotomy (and positioning themselves in the “pure” half of it), women do not retreat to some form of (neo)conservatism or escapism, but actually opt for choices that enable them to reject *both* the excesses of socialism *and* the “brave new world” of capitalism and the “market economy.”

## BETWEEN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE

Fragmentation is not something just negative or the result of a failure.  
Fragmentation is a sign of success.

Lynne Segal (Bahovec 1993a: 20)

The popular thinking is usually that men are somehow “above” or “more important” than women and that “things have always been that way.” Although women and men had the same pay for the same jobs<sup>233</sup> in the former SFR Yugoslavia, this is another aspect where backlash against the former communist régime is present. Many men resent that women should have the same pay (as is postulated in the Slovenian Constitution). There are women that themselves believe

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<sup>232</sup> Family and children, on the other hand, came quite frequently and quite spontaneously as conversation topics. I have to note that I did not mind this lack of talk about politics — quite on the contrary!

<sup>233</sup> Which, of course, *does not mean that they were taking the same jobs* — men tended to take more highly-paid jobs like the chief executives, managers, and the like.

that men should be paid more. They see the equality propagated by the communist system as in some way diminishing them as women and at the same time emasculating men. This is seen as one of the primary causes of different problems, both within and outside the family. Things, they believe, were very different in the past.

However, this is not necessarily the case. I have pointed to some statistics regarding families in the previous section. One can go even further into the past. The main reason for this “time travel” is to show how the claims that women have always been totally subjugated and that things were this way “always” are wrong. If women had a certain level of autonomy as far back as the 14th century CE, it just adds to my thesis that the gender construction that justifies oppression is a cultural process, in no way necessary or irreversible, and that it has nothing to do with categories like “history” or “tradition.”

According to the data presented by Darja Mihelič (1978), the 13th and 14th century urban and semi-urban population in the region of Piran, on the Slovenian part of the Adriatic sea, had views and laws which would be considered quite “liberal” by today’s standards. For example, both male and female children had equal rights regarding inheritance, and husband and wife were supposed to split all of the family belongings *equally* in case of divorce.

Girls could marry when they were 12, boys when they were 14. In case of divorce, both could marry again. The dowry was negotiated in advance, and there is at least one example (a dowry arrangement of December 13, 1288) where it was specifically written that the bride brings no dowry into the marriage — although she was entitled to the half of everything that she and her husband earned (Mihelič 1978: 26)!

The Statute of Piran specifically notes that *both* spouses have equal rights in administering the property. The husband could not borrow money without his wife’s approval, the wife could not borrow money without the approval of the *podestat*

(local lord).<sup>234</sup> There are examples of women investing in the local market, and in particular in the salt trade. Widows frequently owned stores by themselves — and some independent trade was also done by both married and single women.

In the case of an unlawful divorce initiated by the husband (that is to say, if the court would determine that there were no valid reasons for it), the wife was free to return home. Overall, even though they were not yet in the positions of political power, women did have equal economic rights.<sup>235</sup>

The biological differences between men and women (primarily seen in the “natural” role of women as “mothers” [Ule, Ferligoj and Renner 1990: 13ff]) have been used as an explanation for the neglect of women’s rights — both individual (especially regarding the reproductive rights!) and political (poor representation of women in the political life as a consequence). This has been attempted primarily through a certain *construction* of the past: in popular (and usually populist) discourses, men were dominant and women were subservient, and life was much better.

This is a good example of the idealization of the past: by creating a certain narrative (in this case, of the past when everything was perfect and far removed from all the uncertainties of the present), the politically and economically dominant structure seeks to justify its domination. The image that “things were much better” because “everyone knew his or her proper place in the family” is a gross exaggeration and oversimplification of the complex system of relationships, and it has to be put in the context of the present political and ideological battles. Even if things were much

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<sup>234</sup> Although there was a period (from 1307 until 1332) when they had to secure three persons to guarantee for them. The local lord was an elected (male) official, who was performing duties comparable to those of a mayor.

<sup>235</sup> Which was quite similar to the situation in some other communities on the Adriatic — like Dubrovnik, for example.

better,<sup>236</sup> the fact that one gender was in a position of absolute domination would not necessarily provide the logical justification for the continuation of this practice.

In this chapter, I started with the debates related to the proposed changes in the Slovenian Maternity Leave Law, and proceeded to put the debates related to gender identity and difference in the context of political debates, as well as in the context on the debates on the role of the family. My main purpose was to analyze certain types of discourses and trace them to the similar examples in the past (for example, the nationalists' claim that women should have more children). The biological argument (women as nurturers and providers of the harmony and love within the family) that is the basis of the proposed changes in the SMLL postulates women as different but fundamentally *unequal* to men. Both the statistics and some of the preserved historical records show that one cannot just simply speak of absolute oppression and absolute subordination. I am not claiming that women from the 14th century commune of Piran were equal to men — they definitively did not have equal access to political power —, but they definitively had certain important rights. Both comparative data (primarily studies of peasant communities in France [Segalen 1983]) and my own observations in Prespa show that a certain level of economic rights is a necessary prerequisite for what might be considered as a road towards equality. This road is by no means straightforward or easy to navigate — it is more like a narrow winding mountain path.

In the next chapter, I will follow this narrow path, first through the writings on equality and difference, and then through some representations of gender as both a subject and an object of contemporary anthropology.

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<sup>236</sup> And in cases of both Macedonia and Slovenia they were not! People born before the WWII definitively remember all the economic hardships they had to go through. (In the case of Macedonia, there was a total negation and repression of the language, cultural identity, etc. up until 1944.)

# Writing gender:

## Gendered discourses and contemporary anthropology

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.

"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."

"How do you know that I'm mad?" said Alice.

"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."

(Carroll 1992a: 55)

## GENDERED DISCOURSES: *L'ÉCRITURE FÉMININE*

To demand equality as women is, it seems to me, a mistaken expression of a real objective. The demand to be equal presupposes a point of comparison. To whom or to what do women want to be equalized? To men? To a salary? To a public office? To what standard? Why not to themselves?

(Irigaray 1993a: 12)

In the last three chapters I have offered some examples of the construction of gender difference(s) and attitudes towards equality in Macedonia and in Slovenia. In this chapter, I will suggest other directions for the discussion of gender construction in contemporary anthropology. These directions will take the discussion from Macedonian public and Slovenian feminist (as well as public) discourses "back" to Western gender-related discourses.

I will begin with a discussion related to the concepts of gender equality and difference, most clearly developed in the works of the representatives of what is sometimes referred to as *l'écriture féminine*, especially Luce Irigaray. Irigaray seems particularly appropriate since many contemporary Slovenian feminists (authors around the journal *Delta*, especially Zupanc Ećimović 1995) operate within the methodological framework influenced by psychoanalysis, especially by Lacan.<sup>237</sup> Since Irigaray's concern with difference(s) is also reflected in the attitudes towards the *body* (for example, 1993a: 38-41), I will proceed with an outline of body imagery relevant for contemporary culture. This is also something which is readily recognizable in the context of Slovenian feminist discourses: a significant part (five

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<sup>237</sup> Irigaray was recently (November 1995) in Ljubljana co-hosting a conference on gender and citizenship.



articles + an interview with the State Prosecutor) of the second issue of the review *Delta* (published in November 1995) was devoted to what the editors call "Politics and Ethics of the Body." Finally, I shall examine some ("idealized") everyday beliefs about gender and their relationship with anthropological research, finishing the chapter with the one area of anthropology where "the second sex" has had a truly remarkable impact.

Important breakthroughs in gender studies were initiated in the last two decades with the publication of works of French critical feminists, some of which became better known as the theorists of "feminine writing" (*l'écriture féminine*). One of the major figures associated with this direction in gender studies is French philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray.<sup>238</sup>

Irigaray pays great attention to gender-biases in languages (1985*a*, 1985*d*, 1990, 1993*b*: 172-176, etc.), although this is somewhat limited to the extent that her examples work best in the French language only.<sup>239</sup>

She published several of her essays in 1974 under the title *Speculum. De l'autre femme* (Irigaray 1985*b*),<sup>240</sup> and this publication provoked her expulsion from the Lacanian psychoanalytic group, as well as from her teaching post at the

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<sup>238</sup> I am not interested here in the properly psychoanalytic aspects of her work, such as that involving alternative genealogies (mother-daughter and mother-son or father-daughter instead of the all prevalent father-son), or her criticism of the "phallographic" theories of Lacan, so these aspects will be omitted in this brief discussion. For a sympathetic treatment of Lacan from a critical feminist perspective, see Grosz 1990.

<sup>239</sup> They are much less clear in English translation, and I do not find such an extensive gender bias in the South Slavic languages that I am familiar with (Macedonian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Bulgarian). However, the fact is that a gender bias *is* present (albeit in varying degrees) in possibly all human languages. For a very good analysis of radically sexist discourse in English (both as words and as images), see Winant 1990.

<sup>240</sup> The title itself is a play of words, not readily translatable into English; although in the English translation is *Speculum of the Other Woman*, it seems that Irigaray would prefer *Speculum: About the Other Woman*, or even *Speculum: On the Other Woman*, with much stronger sense of the woman perceived as the other in the dominant (androcentric or at least male-oriented scientific) discourse.

University of Vincennes.<sup>241</sup> The book itself presents a brilliant deconstruction (one is almost tempted to say a vivisection) of Freud's views and misunderstandings of women, emphasizing the fact that Freud (and his followers in this regard as well) knew nothing or (at best) very little about the female body, and that the only kind of sexuality for which Freudian analysis allows is *male sexuality*. Female sexuality seems to be defined only in terms of lack or unfulfilment, its main characteristic being its failure to be male. Irigaray's critique is devastating, and it is easy to see how it must have infuriated her "colleagues." (It is less easy to see how it justified their actions against her.) *Speculum* has initiated a series of works aiming at the social and cultural transformation of the ways in which gender and gender relations are represented. Irigaray's particular emphasis was on the (mis)representations of the (female) body, and she traced these (mis)representations in the history of the Western thought (in *Speculum*, with a wonderful presentation of Plato's fragments about women). As she put it in an interview with Alice Jardine in September 1987,

*Speculum* criticizes the exclusive right of the use(s), exchange(s), representation(s) of one sex by the other. This critique is accompanied by the beginnings of a woman's phenomenological elaboration of the auto-affection and auto-representation of her body: Luce Irigaray, signatory of the book. What this implies is that the female body is not to remain the object of men's discourse or their various arts but to become the object of a female subjectivity experiencing and identifying itself. Such research attempts to suggest to women a morpho-logic that is appropriate to their bodies. It's aimed at the male subject, too, inviting him to redefine himself as a body with a view to exchanges between sexed subjects.

(1993a: 59)

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<sup>241</sup> Fortunately, she did manage to keep her post at the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) in Paris. Today, she is a practicing psychoanalyst, and she also teaches philosophy at the Collège Internationale de philosophie.

The emphasis that I am primarily interested in is present in her discussions of gender differentiation and difference. Each gender is postulated as the other in regard to the other (again) gender. Their value is (at least, it should be) equal, but with the recognition of all the differences. Although some of Irigaray's historical considerations leave much to mere speculation (for example, a consideration of ancient matriarchy as the "rule of the female genealogies," when the world was supposedly a much easier place to live in, starting from Bachoffen's *Mutterrecht*, etc.<sup>242</sup>), her analysis of factual inequalities (or, as she would say, the collapsing of both male and female genealogies into male ones only, with all its cultural and social implications [1993b: v]) offers a solution in realizing that the basis for a meaningful relationship between the sexes (and for Irigaray, the true extent of the relationship of men and women as equals is expressed in and through love [Irigaray 1992a, 1992b]) should be negotiated in terms of different identities. Male and female identities are essentially different, and one has to realize that in order to comprehend "the other" in this relationship. Male and female identities complement each other, but they can never be "translated" or in any way subsumed in one another. Some of the basic problems in gender relations today lie in the fact that too often people try exactly this, some kind of "translation," and Irigaray realizes that the roots of this are actually much wider and part of the specific cultural milieu. Claims for equality are somewhat paradoxical, because they usually do not question the underlying power-structures that govern societies:

If the female gender does make a demand, all too often it is based upon a claim for equal rights and this risks ending in the destruction of gender. Comedy arises out of this collision of rights and duties since it expresses the contradiction of an absolute in opposition.

(1993b: 115)

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<sup>242</sup> Cf. her brief analysis in 1993a: 17-19, which is based on stereotype that there was at some point some kind of a "matriarchal" society, when goddesses ruled over gods, and the life was much less violent and more oriented towards genuine human needs.

Irigaray almost mocks women that “decide to become equal” in a more traditional sense:

In order to escape this situation, a certain number of women have decided to become men’s equals (...) Identifying with men allows them a sexuality which seems more free and ‘sporty’, part masculine, part feminine. It does not fulfill them emotionally or culturally.

(1992b: 3)<sup>243</sup>

In another lecture (in 1984), Irigaray makes her objections to the claims of equality clearer, as well as the wider context in which the events that she is writing about take place:

Claims that men, races, sexes, are equal in point of fact signal a disdain or a denial for real phenomena and give rise to an imperialism that is even more pernicious than those that retain traces of difference. Today it is all too clear that there is no equality of wealth, and claims of equal rights to culture have blown up in our faces. All those who advocate equality need to come to terms with the fact that their claims produce a greater and greater split between the so-called equal units and those authorities or transcendences used to measure or outmeasure them (...) Any woman who is seeking equality (with whom? with what?) needs to give this problem serious consideration. It is understandable that women should wish for equal pay, equal career opportunities. But what is their real goal?

(1993b: vi)

The real goal, according to Irigaray, should be that women should demand that their status in society be negotiated on the basis of a system of differences.<sup>244</sup> They should also make clear the message that “without women, there is no society.”

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<sup>243</sup> It is interesting to compare this view with the one expressed by Baudrillard 1996 — quoted in the next chapter.

<sup>244</sup> Irigaray starts from a different premise, but her question is identical to the one posed by bell hooks: “Since men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to?” (quoted in Švab 1996a: 6).

This is related to the whole series of underlying assumptions that are prevalent in our (Western or Westernized) cultures and societies, for:

It is clear that our societies assume that *the mother should feed her child for free*, before and after the birth, and that she should remain the nurse of man and society. She is *the totem before any totem is designated*, identified, represented. This state of affairs must be understood if we are to learn how a woman, or women, can find a place without remaining shadowy nurses. This traditional role that is allotted to women almost ritually paralyzes male society as well and permits the continued destruction of the natural reserves of life. It sustains the illusion that food should come to us free, and, in any case, can never fail us. In the same way, women could never fail us, especially mothers.

(1993b: 83)

One of the most important points that Irigaray repeatedly makes is the notion of dependence (women can never fail us), which she connects with the mismanagement of the environmental resources, ecological crisis, etc. (in fact, she has published several lectures about the moral and psychological consequences of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster). This is a very important point, and the fact is that it figures much more prominently in the writings of female scholars.

Despite the explicit claim that the kind of factual inequality that Irigaray describes (dependence instead of interdependence) is directly responsible for ecological disasters and warfare (and that, essentially, by their "nature," only men are responsible for them), Irigaray somewhat idealizes the image of woman the nurturer herself. Would everything be just fine if only women were in charge? Well, we simply do not know. What we do know, however, is that it is a fact that women are supposed to give (rent?) their bodies for pleasure (not necessarily their own) and for procreation.

According to Irigaray (for example, 1993a), most legal and cultural codes justify these uses of the body (particularly the procreation part) in terms of some

“natural right” or obligation. But, if every other transaction in the contemporary (Western or Westernized) world has a price and is formally (legally) regulated, Irigaray has the right to ask: why not put a price on how much it costs to raise a child?<sup>245</sup> (If someone wants to do it for free, she can, but this should not be set as an *obligation* for everyone.)<sup>246</sup>

The way out of this paradoxical situation lies in the recognition of female genealogies as both *different* and *equal* to male genealogies,<sup>247</sup> as well as in the recognition and codification of this culture of difference (to paraphrase the title of her recent book). As she wrote in 1988 (in the introduction to the Japanese translation of the *Elemental Passions*):

While man has a spiritual and natural reference as he becomes a man, woman no longer belongs except biologically, and the world of man has made that biology its own. Men exchange virgin daughters in order to establish families or tribes or states, they marry women to found their dynasties, they impregnate them to become fathers and have a posterity.

(1992b: 2)

However, when Irigaray steps on the terrain of codification (legal protection of women both as virgins and as mothers [1993a: 86-90]), it is difficult to see how she intends to convince the holders of power (the  $\alpha$  males?) to give up their hold on it. If I enjoy certain rights and privileges, even if it means that some other people have less rights and privileges, why should I give them up? It seems that the appeal to the culture of difference is based on the (in my opinion completely unjustified)

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<sup>245</sup> For the examination of the “naturalness” of associating women primarily with childbearing, see also Collier and Yanagisako 1987: 32-33 and Quinn 1977: 188, 191-193.

<sup>246</sup> Although this line of argumentation may appear shocking or at least fairly unpleasant, I do find Irigaray’s argument reasonable. If certain things or categories are constructed by society in a certain way, it still does not mean that they could not be reexamined and perhaps reevaluated.

<sup>247</sup> She frequently points at the importance of the mother/daughter relationship as the one relationship that is frequently being neglected. A somewhat different perspective is offered by Julia Kristeva when she discusses the paintings of the Italian renaissance artist Bellini (Kristeva 1980).



assumption that there is something inherently good in "human nature,"<sup>248</sup> something that strives to make life for other fellow human beings as nice and easy as possible. The entire human history teaches us exactly the opposite.

On the other hand, Irigaray continues, women have a powerful weapon exactly *because* they are different. Sexual difference, apart from being a source of miscomprehension, is also the card that they can play with, by exploring and (in a way) utilizing their own sexuality. This implies primarily that women should be made aware of their own bodies and be able to accept them in a different dimension. The key term that Irigaray uses, *jouissance*,<sup>249</sup> implies a word play that is untranslatable in English, the main meaning being "enjoyment" (although in a sense that is stronger than the meaning of this concept in English<sup>250</sup>), "joy," or "bliss," but the closest translation would be the kind of happiness and joy that comes with and follows immediately after orgasm. The message that Irigaray tries to put across is not that this makes women inherently superior to men (of course, in terms of possibilities of experiencing *jouissance*, it does, and Irigaray frequently points to the essential *plurality* by and through which women experience their sexuality<sup>251</sup>), but that by realizing their own true potential (as well as their difference), women could and

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<sup>248</sup> I would object to the notion that anything like "human nature" even exists.

<sup>249</sup> The same concept is used, although in a slightly different context, by Julia Kristeva in her writings on motherhood and pregnancy (Dallery 1990: 275-276). Cixous uses *jouissance* to refer to "pleasure," for example in her discussion of the "economies of pleasure" (1994: 131-136).

<sup>250</sup> For example, *jouissance de la vivre* would mean "enjoying life to its fullest." The word *jouissance* also implies happiness connected with the possession of some valuable thing. Its root comes from the verb *jouir*, one of whose main meanings is "to come," and nowadays is used in French almost exclusively in the sexual context.

<sup>251</sup> Which can also serve to stress the plurality of possible experiences of sexual pleasure that women have, a universe of possibilities from which men are (by biology) excluded. A point that is also discussed in detail by Cixous, for example 1989: 107.

should be able to overcome obstacles that cultures and societies put before them.<sup>252</sup>

Or, as summarized by Irigaray:

For this culture to advance, therefore, new models of sexual identity must be established. Woman must be valued as a daughter (a virgin for herself, and not so that her body has an exchange value amongst men), as a lover, and in her own line. This means that she should not be subordinated first to her father, her uncle or her brother, then to her husband's line, nor to the values of a masculine identity, whether these be social, economic or cultural. She therefore needs her own linguistic, religious and political values. She needs to be situated and valued, to be *she* in relation to her self.

(1992b: 3)

This also opens the question of identity, as well as of generalization. For even in the (Western) societies that Irigaray is talking about, there is not one image<sup>253</sup> or obstacle to be overcome. There are as many wrong images and forced identities as there are oppressed women — so is it really possible to define (or even to conceive) a single voice speaking for them?

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<sup>252</sup> Cf. the ancient Greek perspective as outlined by Winkler (1990: 205-206), which closely corresponds with Irigaray's views. Female sexuality is seen as a source (not the only one, of course) of female power, not weakness.

<sup>253</sup> Or perception; the perceived image of some situation as in any way "natural."

## I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC: BODIES, SEXES, ANTHROPOLOGISTS, METAPHORS

A European friend, significant in the field of semiotics, told me in 1980, "You know, I could never love a woman with a body like a Rubens." In a café, lots of laughter between us, he spoke a learned, perverse little discourse that all my experience and theory confirm. Just the flavour of it: "*Playboy* is in my head. I can't help it. I decode, a centerfold, say, and it's sex between two autarchies. There *I* am, learned before the class, connotation, ideology, blah blah, flush with my students' praise. And *she's there too*. She subsists, I want her — all the while I'm decoding. I never dismantled anything."

(Blonsky 1985: xxxv)

The previous section illustrated some important points regarding the uses and iconography of the body — insofar as it relates to gender difference. In the chapter "What's in a name?" I referred to a particular way of representing body (the advertisement poster campaign in Slovenia) in order to illustrate some of the "local" (Slovenian) attitudes towards a specific way of body objectification. The concept of the body was also discussed in the context of gender differences in education in Slovenia (for example, Bahovec 1996: 114-115). In this section, I will try to present similar iconography in a slightly wider context.

The image of the body, the sexed body, the eroticized body, has always been an integral part of Western culture. In classical Greek culture, this image was expressed in different ways in art, religion and philosophy. However, it is only relatively recently that more attention has been paid to this part of the "classical" Western heritage. Studies like the one by Winkler (1990) point out the importance of the gender category and the gender/sex perspective that is too often absent from the

studies of cultures and societies throughout Western intellectual history.<sup>254</sup> Of course, the paradox is that the gender(ed) image was always present. The image of the gender(ed) body with all its implications is an integral part of Western artistic, aesthetic, and other forms of expression. The images, the bodies, and the meanings we attach to (or project into) them are always present. They are part of our understanding of the world. But this does not mean that it is easy to accept them as such. In the recent words of a feminist scholar:

What we have to do is stop apologising. There is no right way to look and be a serious thinker, if you are young and female in this culture. It's time to say fuck you, I'm gonna have footnotes, I'm gonna have breasts. Yes, I like nice sweaters. I do. Sue me.

Naomi Wolf (Pearson 1993: 17)

The above outburst came in an interview by one of the most popular feminist authors of the younger generation.<sup>255</sup> It came as the question of physical appearance was being raised,<sup>256</sup> and whether it contributed to the publicity surrounding the books and public appearances of Naomi Wolf. Her first book, *The Beauty Myth*, exposed the degree of prejudice regarding looks (different ideals of beauty), and the way it was reflected in literature. Some critics were quick to point out that the author herself (a very attractive young woman, to say the least) could not have known what the “beauty problem” really must be for a great number of women — by virtue of her looks, she would have found all (or most) of the doors (especially the ones related to publicity) wide open. This is true to an extent, but one should not forget that the visual media presentation has its own rules, which do not necessarily correspond to the Western idealized concept of “beauty.” Any TV producer (or anyone in the

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<sup>254</sup> Sex and sexuality always have to do with gendered bodies, and these bodies have to be gendered in a certain way precisely in order to be erotic.

<sup>255</sup> Naomi Wolf was born in 1962.

<sup>256</sup> It is interesting to compare Wolf's attitudes (“I like nice sweaters”) to the ones expressed by Lovibond (1989), for example. Sabina Lovibond finds almost any mention of women's (and feminists' in particular) physical appearance (in terms of “presentability”) offensive.

business of photography) knows very well that there are beautiful men and women who just look awkward in front of cameras, and there are many who have nothing exceptional about their looks, but somehow cameras seem to “love” them. The publicity issue has more to do with the possibility of successful visual presentation than with looks itself. Which does not alter the fact that the “beautiful” woman (or man) will probably be much more successful in job interviews (especially if they are conducted by members of the opposite sex) and similar quests. It is not my intention to discuss here the “beauty myth” (Wolf did it already), but to point to some of the facets of contemporary anthropology that have to do with the concepts related to the body.

The imagery of naked girls from the pages of *Playboy* <sup>257</sup> (referred to in the epigraph at the beginning of this section) is just one of the examples of this genderedness. Of course, this imagery has wider meanings (the quotation was taken from a book on semiotics) both within the culture where it is produced and reproduced and within the context of something like the “American way of life.” The imagery from this magazine is interesting because it seems to display the female body (usually girls in their late teens or early 20s) in a culturally acceptable way. Somewhat surprisingly, I have found that many of my American female friends do not object to *Playboy* (the fact that this magazine also has some excellent stories and interviews helps), although they would not put the centerfolds on the walls of their rooms. They normally do object to more “serious” magazines of the same type, like *Penthouse* or *Hustler* (cf. Rodgeron and Wilson 1991; for a slightly different perspective Zizek 1989). Since I find that the basic imagery is the same, the question that seems to be worth asking here is: how is this different imagery mediated? What is it within the specific culture that makes some representations of the human (in this case, female) body more or less “acceptable”?<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Or even on the Internet, more recently.

<sup>258</sup> I have to note that I am not interested here in the semiotic aspects of the imagery and the changes that it may reflect within popular culture; my only interest is in representations of the

The answer to this question depends to a large extent on the prevailing cultural and social norms within each culture or society.<sup>259</sup> While there is no universal criterion regarding greater or lesser “acceptability” of particular types of imagery, the fact is that many industries (from clothing to cosmetics) rely heavily on certain types of images that enable them to sell their products (Rodgers and Wilson 1991). Note that the porn and soft-porn industry of the *Playboy* type is not even mentioned here — as a matter of fact, it is quite unimportant and relatively benign in terms of actual profit-making or market-influencing strategies.<sup>260</sup> The body, especially if it conforms to current cultural and social aesthetic ideals (norms) becomes something that can be bartered, exchanged, or sold. (Not only rented, which is one of the main points made by Irigaray and Kristeva.) The body has become a commodity, a fetish. The appropriate (“politically correct”) image of the body results in its veneration (as an ideal) and promotes a whole set of values behind the image.<sup>261</sup>

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gendered/sexualized body in the context of the gender relations in the postmodern world, and the implications that these representations have for contemporary anthropology (i.e., does anthropology respond to the challenges that are posed in this form, and if it does, in what way?).

<sup>259</sup> The first question after I presented a paper on feminist discourses in Slovenia (Boskovic 1996) was whether pornography is a big problem in Slovenia — as it seems to be in other former communist countries.

<sup>260</sup> Just like the hard-core pornographic industry, which is highly publicized and frequently taken as an example of the ultimate degradation of women (“women as sexual objects”). However, in terms of images and values that this industry projects, as well as in terms of its actual influence and reach, compared to other, perfectly acceptable and “decent” industries, it is completely marginal.

<sup>261</sup> For the incredibly sexist and racist set of values behind the images displayed on the early 20th century French colonial postcards from Africa, cf. Corbey 1988. I found the degree to which the women and girls depicted in these pictures were dehumanized (and at the same time both animalized and eroticized in an “exotic” fashion) almost incomprehensible (and so did Corbey). But it shows very well and very clearly one way of dealing with images of bodies. While the representation of the naked body is strongly discouraged in Western contemporary culture, the “natives,” being symbolically desexualized and deerotized (by the very fact that they were and are *the objects of study*) can be depicted nude. Their sexuality is abstracted, hidden, or disguised — depending on the researcher’s interests. A friend of mine has recently (1994) suggested to me that *National Geographic* actually



Therefore, it is interesting to look at the way(s) in which the body is promoted and advertised: the body as an integral part of consumer culture (Featherstone 1991; Vestergaard and Schrøder 1986), and body as a construction.

Advertised and idealized bodies are, of course, only ideals. Ordinary heterosexual males (to take one example) do not really expect to meet someone who looks like Kelly LeBrock or other glamorous actresses/models. The image itself is somewhat reminiscent of a fairy-tale plot: most (if not all) of us like to dream (or daydream) of the prince or princess (on the white horse, on the white sailing ship, or in the white Lamborghini, for example). Although not omnipotent in “reality,” we dream of the day (or hour) of our omnipotency, when everything wished for can materialize. The fact that we are well aware that these are only dreams does not prevent us from dreaming about this. The image that is projected in and through advertising is able to offer for a fleeting second (“girls, buy this, and you can look just like me/ guys, get this after-shave and you can be with someone just as beautiful as me” and the like) the sensation that is more than real (in the words from a U2 song: *even better than the real thing*), the feeling that crosses right into hyperreality.

To go back to Marshall Blonsky’s “European friend” from the beginning of this section, why could he not feel attracted to a woman “with a body like a Rubens”? The answer is part of the coding of what is “admissible” and what is “inadmissible” in contemporary culture. The cult of the body, at least as far as the late-Victorian era (Bordo 1990: 83ff) promotes and markets a specific kind and shape of body: the firm, slender body (especially with regard to a female one) becomes an

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serves as substitute for *Playboy* in her country (USA), since “little boys can look at the tits of native women.”

The question of the relationship between pornography and ethnographic imagery is also mentioned by the performance artist Coco Fusco (referring to a performance/installation piece for the 1993 Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art): “We wanted to connect pornographically inflected voyeurism with ethnography — the voyeurism involved in turning us into ethnographic objects on display. Looking at naked women of color in National Geographic constitutes the first pornographic experience for a lot of American boys” (Lavin 1994: 82).

ideal. "Working out" has become an important aspect of contemporary life in Western industrialized societies, but this "required" (in a cultural, not necessarily in a physical or biomedical sense) exercise is part of the coding. The messages coded are that the people who "work out" (almost necessarily middle or upper class, or the ones aspiring to these classes) are somehow "in charge": "I work out" (jog, do weights, etc.) means "I am in control of my body" and, by extension, "I can control my sexuality."<sup>262</sup> Everything is organized, systematized, put under control. As Susan Bordo puts it:

Muscularity has had a variety of cultural meanings (until recently largely reserved for male bodies) which have prevented the well-developed body from playing too great a role in middle-class conceptions of attractiveness. Of course, muscles have symbolized masculine power. But at the same time, they have been associated with manual labor and chain gangs (and thus with lower-class and even criminal status), and suffused with racial meaning (via numerous film representations of sweating, glistening bodies belonging to black slaves and prizefighters). Given the racial and class biases of our culture, they were associated with the body as material, unconscious, or animalistic. Today, however, the well-muscled body has become a cultural icon; "working out" is a glamorized and sexualized yuppie activity. No longer signifying lower-class status (except when developed to extremes, at which point the old associations of muscles with brute, unconscious materiality surfaces once more), the firm, developed body has become a symbol of correct *attitude*; it means that one "cares" about oneself and how one appears to others, suggesting willpower, energy, control over infantile impulse, the ability to "make something" of oneself.

(1990: 94-95)

Although it is usually assumed (within the "general public" — that is to say, the consumers) that the imagery of the body primarily has to do with images of the

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<sup>262</sup> It has already been noted by Iona Mayer that "any assertion of status distinction demands a tight handling of the body" (1975: 260; quoted in Ardener 1987: 114).

female body, this is actually not the case. As Naomi Wolf wrote: "Advertisers have recently figured out that undermining sexual self-confidence works, whatever the targeted gender. Using images from male homosexual subculture, advertising has begun to portray the male body in a beauty myth of its own" (quoted in Kane 1996). But the whole culture of body imagery can also be seen as a result of the relative affluence of *certain segments of society* — poor or homeless people generally do not go to gyms, and it is highly unlikely that one will encounter any of them happily jogging through some park with their walkman on full volume.

For men *who have never done manual labour* — and in these post-industrial times, that must mean most of them — the gym is like a gleaming parody of proletarian work: arms, legs and torsos subjected to the punishing demands of heavy machinery. And in a weird reversal of the factory floor, the labouring serfs often deliberately increase their level of toil — programming their treadmills to even higher speeds.

(Kane 1996; emphasis mine)<sup>263</sup>

The newspaper columnist Suzy Menkes (1996a) observes that:

It is symbolic of all the changes in women's role in the 20th century that the feminine, maternal ideal of rounded breast and stomach should be replaced by broad shoulders, slim waist and hips, flat stomach and well-muscled legs — all the features that have traditionally represented virile masculinity.

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<sup>263</sup> Of course, in all fairness to Pat Kane, she does not seem to mind very much these processes of body marketing and construction. When men are portrayed as sexual objects, she seems to see it as, basically, men tasting their own medicine, and even a possibility for enjoyment, as she wrote commenting on a fashion show:

It was like an army of perfection: the geometric pecs like headlights on a Seventies Cadillac; the hairless bodies and gloopy grins, loping behind the fashion guru like some job-lot of white slaves. They looked like objects, and I felt objectified by them. But what beautiful objects.

Of course, it is not entirely clear whether in this sort of body construction one gender is trying just to emulate the other as means of its own redefinition. Do women actually want to look like like men? Do men want to look like women? In a full circle from some nationalistic discourses referred to in the previous chapter, the image of woman as mother is not “in.” It is not fashionable enough,<sup>264</sup> it cannot be properly marketed and sold. Since the current trend and the fashion in the Western world is going more towards the muscular (“manly”) body, critics like Irigaray would point out that that actually means very little for women’s emancipation (“equal to what?”). Authors like Wolf consider the male beauty myth even more dangerous than the female version, since (according to her), males are very ill equipped to deal with insecurities and self-depreciation that the outside constructed imagery can inflict on them.

Of course, everything gets more consumer-oriented and market-conscious. Leading fashion designers make their products now only for the ones who are “fit,” who are in perfect shape. If you want to wear the latest fashion, you have to look appropriate (or you have to look like the latest fashion trend) — “even in high fashion, the body comes first” (Menkes 1996b). By portraying these trends through high-profile personalities, contemporary designers can design and envision a new reality. (Not that they actually believe that more people will conform to the “ideal” standards — that is perfectly irrelevant. What is relevant is *the image*.)

Among the Slovenian scholars writing about the body politics, I find particularly important<sup>265</sup> the article “Female body in the field of vision” by Eva Bahovec (1995). In this article, the author focuses on the issues related to body and power — in particular, women’s power over their own bodies. This power has in the

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<sup>264</sup> Certainly not regarding the consumers in this context — the Western upper class (or aspiring upper class) individuals.

<sup>265</sup> This article is particularly important for me because, among other things, it devotes a significant space to the media representation(s) of the body — I certainly do not wish to claim that it is *better* than other articles on the body in this issue of *Delta* (Vol. 1, Nos. 1-2, 1995).

past been frequently feared or repressed or both.<sup>266</sup> Bahovec, using in her conclusion as an example the movie *The Crying Game*,<sup>267</sup> takes issue with feminist critics who “read” oppression and the “men’s gaze” into current debates on the (fashion-derived and designed) imagery and iconography of the female body. She concludes, on a Foucauldian note, that women are not merely “objects,” that the problem of *representation* is essentially that of a “masquerade” (Bahovec 1995: 38-39), which women themselves can influence and use to their own advantage. The female position is not one of a mere *object* (of denigrating men’s gaze), but one of a void symbolic subjectivity (1995: 40). There is no “essence” or some hidden “true meaning” in these images — it is always the participants that “fill in” the mosaic. By realizing that they are not just passive objects, women can express and model their own images, representations of their own bodies.

A marketing of the body, a reconstruction of the body in accordance with the current standards and stereotypes, forms a significant part of the construction of reality in the media. Of course, marketing the body in various forms has a long history; but the main characteristic of it in the contemporary world is its fetishization — the body becomes an object in consumer culture.<sup>268</sup> Contemporary consumer culture, as recently portrayed by Mike Featherstone:

uses images, signs, and symbolic goods which summon up dreams, desires and fantasies which suggest romantic authenticity and emotional fulfilment in narcissistically pleasing oneself, instead of others. Contemporary consumer culture seems to be widening the range of contexts and situations in which such behaviour is deemed appropriate and acceptable.

(Featherstone 1991: 27)

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<sup>266</sup> Apple 1993 provides interesting examples for teachers — one of the “naturalized” professions for women.

<sup>267</sup> The same movie, with its gender swapping/ gender fluctuating iconography, has been used by another important Slovenian scholar, Slavoj Žižek (1993).

<sup>268</sup> For the approaches and possible definition of the term “consumer culture,” I refer to Featherstone 1991.

By becoming an object it is a part of the construction of hyperreality; a new way of marketing underlines and emphasizes the strategies that work best in the consumer culture that we are a part of. It also influences a construction of a new symbolic language, a visual language that promotes the “right” values or attitudes.<sup>269</sup> The strategies of this kind of marketing are difficult to follow in detail, but they can be observed in film and the visual media in general (De Lauretis 1984, 1987; Showalter 1991), as well as in other aspects that deal with gender relations (Giddens 1992; Jacobus, Keller, and Shuttleworth 1990, etc.). It is not my intention to dwell on these strategies here in detail — this is very much the realm of semiotics and related disciplines — but it is worth pointing to awareness of these strategies as a very important feature of contemporary cultural communication. This awareness makes the construction of gender in the contemporary world a much more interesting issue, since it includes a kind of “double talk” by both men and women (as seen in the chapter on Macedonia, also documented in the recent research on gender in Greece<sup>270</sup>), where every side says only what it is expected to say by the other, while at the same time being very well aware that the other side knows that this is just a game and that what is said is not necessarily what is meant (as in Eco’s words quoted above). Both anthropologists’ discourses and the objects of their research also play their parts in this game of meanings. However, in order to see what exactly is meant by gender and gender relations in contemporary anthropology (with its postmodern overtones), we need to make an excursion into another of its sub-disciplines.

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<sup>269</sup> A good example of how this new language is constructed in advertising is presented by Vestergaard and Schrøder 1985, especially pp. 81-108.

<sup>270</sup> For example, in Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991.



## “FEMALES READILY AVAILABLE”: APES, MONKEYS, AND HUMANS

People look at animals, even to learn from them about human beings and human society. People in the twentieth century have been no exception (...) We polish an animal mirror to look for ourselves. The biological sciences' focus on monkeys and apes has sought to make visible both the form and the history of our social and personal bodies. Biology has been pre-eminently a science of visible form, the dissection of visible shape, and the acceptance and construction of visible order. The science of non-human primates, primatology, may be the source of insight or a source of illusion. The issue rests on our skill in the construction of mirrors.

(Haraway 1991: 21)

It is interesting to note that the research on gender in anthropology started to a large extent as a result of the research in primatology (related to physical or biological anthropology) and related disciplines. It would also be interesting to see how much this area of research had to do with purely “political” and much less academic reasons (since it was probably much easier to say certain things in physical anthropology, than it was in social or cultural anthropology), as it was easier to question certain “given” domains that had to do with hierarchy and power. These primarily had to do with issues related to violence and aggression (something that quite a few scholars — particularly of the feminist persuasion — were quick to identify as the “core” reasons behind the male supremacy) and whether violence and aggressive behavior were particular to humans throughout the process of evolution or whether they have been acquired as a set of specific “responses” to specific cultural situations. To put it in very simple (and perhaps even simplistic) terms, popular thinking went as follows: men are stronger, have more physical power and therefore are more likely to resort to violence when things don't go their way (see the specific

references in Quinn 1977: 186-190). Therefore, they are in a position of domination in almost every human culture. One of the dominant narratives in anthropology was: Aggressive behavior “works” — that is why males resort to it. And the question of domination extends way beyond nature and into academia — and anthropology is no exception. For, as Di Leonardo notes:

In fact, despite the admiration and envy of feminists in other fields, women have historically done poorly in anthropology departments: Mead never held an official departmental position, Benedict was passed over as chair for a man when Boas retired, and Elsie Clews Parsons achieved her influence through the use of an independent fortune to finance her own and others’ field trips and publications.

(Di Leonardo 1991b: 5)<sup>271</sup>

The more recent developments in some areas of physical or biological anthropology stand in sharp contrast to this bleak picture. In primatology, most of the significant research in the last two or three decades was done by women, nicely contrasting with the long-standing prejudice of men as “naturally inclined” towards scientific research. As a matter of fact, if one wants to study chimps today, one will necessarily start with the work of Jane Goodall, for mountain gorillas one of the leading authorities is the late Diane Fossey, for orangutans, Birute Galdikas, for baboons, Shirley Strum, etc. Sometimes it looks almost as if female researchers have actually “taken over” this field.

The research conducted in primatology also helped to get rid of some of the prejudices related to male/female interaction, especially in the aspects dealing with sex and power. The issues being discussed underlie some of the most basic functions biologically attributed to males or females.<sup>272</sup> Some authors (Tanner 1981) have

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<sup>271</sup> She also notes that “Most of the notable theoretical movements of the 1920s through the 1960s — and particularly those bearing on topics of direct relevance to women’s status, such as kinship and marriage or the sexual division of labor — ignored or naturalized sexual difference” (Di Leonardo, *ibid.*).

<sup>272</sup> For specific *cultural constructs* related to these biological “facts” see Quinn 1977.

proposed looking at the whole of human evolution in a radically different way, based on the results of their observations of primate interactions. But how far can one get by following the line of inquiry of the connection between aggressive behavior and sex among the primates? And what can it tell one about the gender interactions within a specific academic field?

Many researchers have observed that violent and aggressive behavior is not necessarily the way in which some primates operate, as exemplified by "pygmy chimps" (*Pan troglodytes*) from the tropical forests of Zaire:

Friendly feelings among the bonobos may be linked to sexual receptivity of the female. For almost half of her 46-day menstrual cycle, the female is in estrus or false estrus — signalled by pink swelling. Like chimpanzees, female bonobos give birth at five-year intervals. Unlike them, bonobo females usually resume copulation within a year after bearing offspring. With females readily available, males do not need to compete for their favors.

(Linden 1992: 48)

The argument of female receptivity was also made in an hypothesis on human origins by Owen Lovejoy (1981), connected with the argument for pair-bonding (woman, the nurturer, and man, the provider<sup>273</sup>). The argument (that has been suggested almost invariably by *male* researchers) has provoked a number of angry responses by feminist scholars (like Nancy Tanner and Adrienne Zihlman), who did some significant work among primates.

They were quick to point out that, in most cases, an intelligent diplomacy can achieve more than sheer strength. This is a point of view very much emphasized by scholars like Tanner and frequently overlooked by many of her male colleagues. The narrative that "aggressive behavior always pays off" has been successfully

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<sup>273</sup> Which is, of course, another stereotype that has never been proven (or, for that matter, even tested) in any context.

deconstructed by anthropologists like Strum.<sup>274</sup> In fact, this can be seen as an important part of the “bigger” picture, as summarized by Di Leonardo:

Feminists also noted that in apotheosizing male hunting as the early human activity *par excellence*, “man-the-hunter” theorists ignored key evidence from contemporary hunting and gathering, or foraging, societies: women do some hunting, and female-gathered foods account for more than half and at times nearly all of what is eaten.

(1991b: 7)

It has been objected that most of the models for early hominid behavior stem from the model that emphasizes the role of males (Tanner 1981). As noted by Zihlman,

Growing out of “man the hunter,” the emergence of almost all human behaviors were attributed to hunting: bipedal locomotion evolved for freeing the hands to make and use tools for hunting, for following animals, and carrying the meat back to the home base. Food sharing meant that males gave meat to their mates and their own offspring, females, in return, lost estrus (heat) and became sexually “willing” at all times.<sup>275</sup>

(1985: 367; footnote added)

She goes on specifically to criticize Lovejoy’s (1981) influential article as “male-chauvinistic” and “sexist” (p. 374), noting that most of the prevailing theories of human evolution are male-biased. (On the other hand, it can be argued that the emphasis on the cooperation and friendship that characterizes work of most of the modern female paleoanthropologists and primatologists is also gender-oriented and biased, only in a different direction.) When the origin of hunting (as a form of violent behavior *par excellence*) is concerned, Zihlman notes that we can prove hunting in

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<sup>274</sup> When asked recently whether her conclusions actually represent some kind of “wishful thinking,” Strum pointed out that she has 20 years of field notes to support these conclusions (Eagle 1996).

<sup>275</sup> In regard to females that are “willing” at all times, Lovejoy refers to a “personal communication” of Donald Johanson. This provoked a series of hilarious comments, beginning with the question of how Johanson “personally” knew this, to more philosophical questions of what anthropologists actually do in the field and what fieldwork is all about.

the archaeological record only in the last 200,000 years (Zihlman 1985: 369), millions of years after the hominid divergence from apes, seriously questioning the implications of the primate models for analyzing the behavior of our evolutionary ancestors. There are other and less sensational aspects of primate behavior (primarily connected with the social regulations and *cooperation* within each group) which might be more helpful as working models for understanding certain evolutionary traits.

I started this chapter with an analysis of the writings on gender and difference by Luce Irigaray, and continued with a descriptive section on gender imagery based on contemporary popular culture. Anthropological accounts of the construction of gender have to take into account popular culture because it shapes the ways in which large segments of population form and express their opinions. This is in particular the case with Slovenia,<sup>276</sup> where images from (Western-style) popular culture become part of everyday life. Of course, there are some interesting twists in this Westernization; for example, apart from the Church or extreme right-wing groups, no one seems to be too upset about pornography.<sup>277</sup>

The changing perspectives on the body are closely related to the image of body as an artificial construct (cf. Bigwood 1991). This artificiality becomes even more apparent in the case of physical anthropology, a discipline which deals with bodies and their interactions in a most direct way. The whole dominant discourse that was at one time the basis of this discipline (men as inherently aggressive, "man the hunter, woman the nurturer" dichotomy) is put into a different perspective in the most recent research. Feminist anthropologists (Tanner, Zihlman, Haraway) were able to show the extent to which these alleged "natural facts" were actually cultural constructs aimed not only at proliferation of a certain type of narrative (the aforementioned "man the hunter" hypothesis with all its implications), but also at

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<sup>276</sup> And probably will be with Macedonia in a few years.

<sup>277</sup> One of four main TV channels shows a hard-core movie every Friday night — one could hardly imagine ITV or Channel Four doing the same in Britain!

reproducing a certain type of hierarchy within the discipline itself. The paradox of models derived from primatology lies in the fact that while, on the one hand, they stressed the (often underestimated or totally overlooked) role of the female members of the primate communities, they, on the other hand, also tended to support some evolutionary models that were still extremely androcentric — almost to the point of suggesting that, to paraphrase the title of a famous book (Hrdy 1981), woman has never evolved. However, as a direct result of research and publications of scholars mentioned in this section, this picture is now changing. Models based on cooperation and *complementarity* are challenging previous ones based on a simple male-dominant hierarchy (especially in Tanner 1981).

But this opens a whole series of questions regarding the actual ways in which men and women see each other and interact with each other, the ways which are best presented in the context of specific communities. I have already presented (in previous chapters) some examples relating to Macedonia and Slovenia. These questions can also be looked upon in the context of the gender construction (as well as an interpretation of this construction) in contemporary anthropology. In this case, I take “contemporary anthropology” to be another type of community. It is almost a self-evident “fact” that anthropologists do recognize themselves as well as other anthropologists as co-participants in some sort of exclusive collective entity — this is what I will call “community” here. As an anthropologist studying it I have to rely again on the voices and statements of my fellow anthropologists and students of gender (“informants” in this context), because everything that exists within this community exists as such only because it has been conceptualized as such by them. So, in the next chapter, my main objective is to present my answer to the question how can research on gender (and about gender) influence contemporary anthropological theory?



# In the hall of mirrors:

## Gender, anthropology, postmodernism

The Caterpillar was the first to speak.

"What size do you want to be?" it asked.

"Oh, I'm not particular as to size," Alice hastily replied; "only one doesn't like changing so often, you know."

"I *don't* know," said the Caterpillar.

(Carroll 1992a: 42)

## CHANGING IMAGES: FEMINISM AND POSTMODERNISM

Most people have heard of Post-Modernism and don't have a very clear idea of what it means. They can be forgiven for this confusion because Post-Modernists don't always know (...).

(Jencks 1987: 7)

The previous chapter ended with a snapshot of the influence and role of women in physical and biological anthropology. The impact that, for example, primatologists have had in the last 30 years owes a lot to a specific *political* climate. According to some estimates, 80% of current field research in primatology is conducted by women (Eagle 1996). Of course, the fact that women researchers are gaining a disproportionate influence has also attracted the criticism (outlined in a recent Channel Four TV program [Eagle 1996]) that women are "too sensitive" and identify too easily with the subjects of their study, which leads to them losing their "objectivity."

This is a return to "biologically-centered" views of men and women, where each gender is supposed to "naturally" have certain emotional and psychological traits. But this is also a sort of backlash against a rapidly changing imagery in industrialized Western societies: the greater visibility and presence of women in public life (especially in the last 10-15 years) makes many men (accustomed to the "good old days" when everyone "knew" what "real women" should do<sup>278</sup>) feel extremely vulnerable and almost as if something that they had had "since time immemorial" was suddenly lost.<sup>279</sup> As Clifford Geertz (1990: 19) wrote: "The intrusion, advance, spread, import, insinuation — word choice is important here,

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<sup>278</sup> That is to say, take care of home and children.

<sup>279</sup> The lead-in of a recent article provides a good illustration: "As women win equal rights and financial independence, men are complaining of impotence" (Theobald 1996: 6).

exposing world views, projecting fears — of feminist thought into just about every aspect of contemporary cultural life is by now entirely general.” This presents a very powerful image, constructed with some help of an imagined tradition — although the examples like the one mentioned above on the status of women in medieval Piran, clearly show big cracks in the (supposedly monolithic) imagery of always dominant men and always subordinate women.

In this concluding chapter, I will concentrate on some current debates about the relationship between feminism and postmodernism and then between feminism and anthropology. I started off with postmodern approaches as something that exemplifies difference and multiplicity. Through the chapters on Macedonia and Slovenia I have shown how some specifically postmodern tools (like the construction of hyperreality) can open up new perspectives on the understanding of some societies. I have also shown how the questioning of a certain metanarrative can be useful in comprehending certain social and cultural processes. Deconstruction of the metanarrative that claimed some forms of evolutionary-derived gender differences has been an important part of the anthropological legacy of the last 15-20 years, as shown in the previous chapter. Finally, the concept of instability and uncertainty (as a consequence of the questioning of dominant narratives) is something that people in both Macedonia and Slovenia have to deal with on a daily basis. This element of uncertainty is very important — just as postmodernists do not necessarily “know” what postmodernism “is,” so “feminists” do not necessarily “know” what feminism “is.” Therefore, it is nothing unusual to say that the relationship between feminism and postmodernism is a highly ambiguous one (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen 1989; Moi 1988; Gordon 1993; Strathern 1987*a*, 1987*b*), but I see this ambiguity as a source of strength that comes from diversity.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> This diversity, as well as a need to deconstruct “a unified subject” of feminism, is recognized in recent works of feminist scholars who would not describe themselves as postmodern — for example, Nancy Tuana (1993: 172).

I have already outlined (in the chapter "Postmodernism, anthropology and common sense") some of the debates and questions concerning the legacy of the Enlightenment. That chapter ended with an introduction of issues related to gender (section "Conclusion and points of departure: Defining gender") into the main body of the thesis. Now I am completing the circle and returning to the theoretical issues related to gender. Most of all, I am interested in *the place of gender in contemporary anthropology* and its relation to feminist anthropology. My view is that *gender studies* rather than *feminist studies* provide the most useful matrix for the study and understanding of gender-related issues in contemporary world. Therefore, I think that the place of men in feminism should also be reconsidered. I mention Baudrillard as an important thinker of the contemporary because he argues strongly for the abolishment of dichotomies where one gender regards the other as something else. For him, this process of "othering" is a sign of weakness, not strength. I also mention Baudrillard for his provocative (and, as mentioned above, quite often seriously misunderstood) style. At the same time, Baudrillard is one of the sharpest critics of the "mainstream" (essentialist) feminist theories. His views make him a very unpopular figure among some feminists, and he is well aware of that:

They [the feminists] have shown more detestation for me than they have for the machos. A macho is never anything else but a macho. All you have to do is fight against him. But somebody who comes along and tells you that you have much more sovereignty over men than you think, that throws your mechanism into confusion.

The feminists have rejected me completely. It's a pity.

(Gane 1993: 47)

Finally, while I understand the fear that feminist authors have from postmodern approaches that question everything (including feminists' right to ask certain questions!), I think (together with contemporary feminist authors like Flax [1987] and Butler [1990]) that they have to overcome these fears. Contemporary

anthropology as anthropology of gender (Moore 1994*b*) provides an example of the usefulness of multiple perspectives and multiple voices.

Sabina Lovibond (1989) has tried to reply to some of the points raised in postmodern discourses from a feminist perspective. Lovibond takes as her target three philosophers, Lyotard, Rorty and MacIntyre. All three of them share a deep skepticism towards Enlightenment ideals such as the positioning (and producing) of “grand narratives,” as well as “the pursuit of ideal consensus” and ideas such as Objectivity, Truth, Universal Reason, etc. (1989: 6-10). Lovibond, in contrast, definitively believes that there are metanarratives worth fighting for: “It is difficult to see how one could count oneself a feminist and remain indifferent to the modernist promise of social reconstruction” (1989: 11-12). She continues:

From a *female point of view*, ‘tradition’ has (to put it mildly) an unenviable historical record. Yet, it is in the area of sexual relations that ‘traditional values’ (marriage, home ownership, wholesale family life, etc.) are proving hardest to shift. (...) Still, if we assess without prejudice the implications for gender (...) of the ‘modern’ repudiation of unearned privilege, we may well conclude that this development is an integral part of the package; and if so, it will follow that feminists have at least as much reason as the rest of the world for regarding the ‘project of modernity’, at the present time, as incomplete.

(1989: 12, emphasis mine)<sup>281</sup>

Of course, the “historical tradition” that Lovibond mentions is a generalization and an oversimplification. Furthermore, it is just *wrong* — as I have demonstrated above with the examples from Piran (Mihelič 1978) and France

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<sup>281</sup> The reference to the “incomplete project of modernity” refers to a debate between Jean-François Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas. Without getting into the details of this debate, I cannot quite understand what Habermas was objecting to and why. Habermas seems to, first of all, accept a metanarrative (Modernity in all its glory) and then to derive all his arguments from it. Since Lyotard rejects metanarratives, it is difficult to see how Habermas’ (as well as Lovibond’s) criticism can refer to Lyotard (or any other postmodern author). It is like criticizing a play written in English for not paying enough attention to the nuances of Japanese language. Nice, but what is the point?

(Segalen 1983, 1986). The notion of "tradition" is further relativized in the light of the examples that I have mentioned from Macedonia (as well as numerous cases from Greece<sup>282</sup>). "A female point of view" is something that Lovibond (as well as many of her colleagues) understands as self-evident and taken-for-granted, so she does not even try to explain or define it.

Another important point is that Lovibond seems to believe that postmodern approaches always represent radical and complete breaks with previous (including "modernist") tradition. This is most certainly not the case; as outlined in the chapter "Postmodernism, anthropology and common sense," these approaches are a product of certain ways of looking at things (perceiving "reality"), which have gradually *evolved* and *changed* over time. It is impossible to look at postmodernisms apart from the specific cultural and social milieu where they appear — just as it is impossible for one to read a book if one does not know the language in which it is written.

Criticism of the Enlightenment draws Lovibond towards an examination of Nietzsche's writings. It is true that Nietzsche was one of the first critics of the Enlightenment, but I find it difficult to see how a critique of some of his statements (the examples quoted are incredibly sexist, to be sure!) can be applied to postmodern authors. Lovibond wishes "simply, to suggest that we take seriously Nietzsche's own understanding of his work as a contribution to the overcoming of 'feminism' " (1989: 18-19). But I see quoting Nietzsche's attitudes on feminism from the 1870s and 1880s as hardly relevant to the questions that postmodernism and feminism wish to address more than a century later. Is it possible that Lovibond maintains that the world has not changed in the meantime? Her defense of the embattled Enlightenment principles only strengthens the postmodernists' criticism.

The critique of Modernity and its relation to contemporary feminist discourses is the main theme that Rita Felski explores in her article "Feminism, postmodernism,

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<sup>282</sup> For example, in Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991.



and the critique of Modernity.” Terminology can sometimes be a problem, since she mentions that, according to Alice Jardine:

“[M]odernity” denotes the cluster of issues more often classified under the rubric of postmodernism in the United States: the loss of faith in history and the dialectic, the crisis of truth and representation, the disappearance of the subject. Jardine reads this process as being closely linked to the valorization of the feminine, defined as the space of desire, the maternal body, the mystical, the repressed Other of reason.

(Felski 1989: 34)

Felski criticizes Jardine for essentially seeing feminism as subordinated to the master discourse (*metanarrative* in the terminology that I prefer to use) of poststructuralism (which is used as a synonym for postmodernism), as well as for the failure to establish a theoretical framework “to explain *how* feminism as an oppositional politics and critique is to be integrated with Jardine’s apocalyptic vision of the death of reason, history, and the subject” (1989: 34-35).

The basic problem is how feminist discourses can proceed in their questioning of dominant (patriarchal, as many feminist authors call them<sup>283</sup>) narratives, regarding these dominant narratives as *fictional*, while at the same time regarding their own critique as somehow closer to the *truth*? Would it just be a substitution of one dominant narrative for the other? This would hardly be a pleasant possibility for feminist authors who want to abolish the idea of *domination*. This seems to place feminism as a movement trying to abolish *male domination*, in

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<sup>283</sup> Authors (like Felski here) who use words like “patriarchy” or “patriarchal” usually do not bother to define them (an important exception is Jalusic 1992) — which leaves one with a variety of possible or probable meanings. As Humpty Dumpty told Alice: “When *I* use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.”

opposition to postmodernism, as a movement trying to abolish *all forms of domination*.<sup>284</sup>

One possible solution to this problem is a *refusal* of the whole specter of postmodernism.<sup>285</sup> Drawing upon the work of Hartsock (1987), and using arguments similar to Lovibond (1989), Felski writes that it could be “possible to relativize postmodernism as the symptom of a crisis in established male intellectual authority which bears no relevance to feminist concerns” (1989: 35). But this would seem to be just “too good to be true” — postmodern concerns are part of our world and they cannot be ignored.<sup>286</sup> These concerns include:

the proliferation of information technologies and the gradual shift towards a postindustrial (although not postcapitalist) society, the declining authority of liberalism and Marxism as symptomatic of an increasing skepticism towards metanarratives, the reemergence of feminism and other social movements which have foregrounded difference and exposed the patriarchal, heterosexist, and ethnocentric nature of dominant Western ideals, an expanding aestheticization of everyday life through the mass dissemination of signs and images and a simultaneous questioning of the art/life opposition inherent in high modernism, a shift in philosophical and social theory towards linguistic paradigms accompanied by a sustained critique of foundationalist thought, and so on.

(Felski 1989: 36)

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<sup>284</sup> I have already made clear my view that there are multiple postmodern discourses as well as multiple feminist discourses. The authors that I mention here usually regard both feminism and postmodernism as single and more or less unified movements, so I follow their arguments here using their own terminology.

<sup>285</sup> In Felski's words: “the category of postmodern, whose diagnostic claims can be read as an unwarranted generalization from a particular and limited set of culture experiences” (1989: 35). But feminism can also be seen “as an unwarranted generalization from a particular and limited set of culture experiences” — as non-Western authors like Minh-ha (1987) seem to see it.

<sup>286</sup> Or, if they are ignored, one takes incredible risks. These concerns are *part of the world we live in* — not something that can be arbitrarily accepted or rejected.

There are feminist scholars (for example, Hekman 1990; Flax 1987, 1990) who see the postmodern critique of metanarratives as something that is inherently connected with feminist aspiration (without any need to put feminism or postmodernism in a position of the metanarrative). Although Rita Felski takes a much more cautious approach and cannot quite shake off the problems in the "mainstream" feminist reception of postmodernism,<sup>287</sup> she rightly notes that:

Being oppressed is no guarantee of clarity of vision or possession of truth. Furthermore, women have no exclusive claim upon the experience of oppression, and feminism has been forced in recent years to confront extensive criticisms of its own race and class blindness which is concealed by appeals to a unifying substratum of female identity. The crumbling of an objective, all-embracing standpoint brought about by a pluralization of ideological perspectives problematizes simultaneously the absolute authority of any one of these. There can be no single "feminine" truth which can hope to succeed a deposed patriarchal wisdom.

(Felski 1989: 40)

In response to criticism, and while acknowledging criticisms from the points of view that can be called postmodern, Felski argues for a degree of skepticism and "multi-dimensional" critique of contemporary capitalist culture. It seems to me that, while in general terms siding with Habermas' defense of Modernity, she inserts important points of caution against just rejecting everything that is (or is suspected to be) of "postmodern" or "poststructuralist" origin.

Elsbeth Probyn (1988) presents another way of criticizing postmodernism. She concludes her article in the following way: "For no matter how hyper reality is, it is in the end where we live and speak from" (1988: 309). The main problem with postmodernism, for Probyn, is the lack of *position*, the lack of a *specific place* from

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<sup>287</sup> I take as a "mainstream" feminist reception of postmodernism, those feminist approaches that postulate the existence of universalizing categories (like the "woman") and then derive all their premises from it. They are naturally very suspicious of the projects (like postmodernism) that want to question the possibility of any universal categories.

where one can speak. The "real" is primarily political, and although she does give some credit to "the juxtaposition of feminism and postmodernism" (1988: 305-306), she sees postmodernism as too generalizing, too much removed from the positions (*sites*) of specific lives and voices. Probyn, in my view without much justification, criticizes postmodern authors (especially the feminist ones, like Owens [1992]) exactly for universalizing the "postmodern."

Probyn's notion of specific *sites* represents a starting point for Bondi and Domosh (1992). "In rearticulating the ground that is locally built around us," Probyn writes, "we give feminist answers that show up the ideological conditions of certain postmodern questions" (1990: 187). Bondi and Domosh oppose both the essentialism of what they call "liberal feminism" and the "radical or cultural feminist position which implies that (...) there are two types of knowledge, one masculine, one feminine" (1992: 200-201). Instead, in an interesting blend of postmodernism and feminism, they propose using poststructuralism and deconstruction "to interpret gender difference as a complex and contradictory phenomenon that is both power-laden and unstable" (Bondi and Domosh 1992: 201). There is still criticism of postmodernism (for what they see as "intellectual tourism" — appropriation of female voices by postmodernists) as well as a pointing out of differences (they see feminism as "less deconstructive" [Bondi and Domosh 1992: 209-210]), but, according to Bondi and Domosh, feminism and postmodernism are far from incompatible.

I understand the criticism expressed by Rita Felski (as with the one by Lovibond 1989) to be primarily directed towards a concept of relativism (Lyotard's *language games*). However, in my experience (and taking into account people like Baudrillard, Rorty and Derrida<sup>288</sup>), cognitive relativism does not mean moral

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<sup>288</sup> All three are frequently labelled as more or less "typical" (or at least immensely important) representatives of postmodernism. In the examples referred to here, Lovibond criticizes Rorty, Felski mentions Baudrillard and Derrida. None of the three would describe himself as a "postmodern" thinker.

indifference. The postmodern “baddies” like Baudrillard, Derrida and Rorty do take moral positions and they do engage in current political debates and speak out publicly against war, nationalism, ethnic hatred, racism, sexism, and so on.<sup>289</sup> To proclaim that they are examples of a project that tries to silence the feminist criticism of a specific dominant narrative (“patriarchy”) seems to me to be a bit far-fetched. Unless, of course, the fact that they are *men* is by itself enough for suspicion.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Elizabeth Grosz in particular uses Derridean deconstruction as the point of departure in her critique of male-centered subjectivity:

The dominant and subordinated terms are simply positive and negative versions of each other, the dominant defining other by negation. Binary pairs such as good/bad, presence/absence, mind/matter, being/non-being, identity/difference, culture/nature, signifier/signified, speech/writing and man/woman mark virtually all the texts of philosophy, and provide a methodological validation for knowledges in the West. The first term is given the privilege of defining itself and of relegating to the other all that is *not it...* [Derrida] shows that the positive term gains privilege only by disavowing its intimate independence on its negative double: far from identity or presence generating difference or absence through negation, they can be seen as vitally dependent on their opposites in ways that cannot be acknowledged. To recognise that identity depends on difference, and that presence relies on absence to disturb the very structure of knowledges.

(quoted in Bondi and Domosh 1992: 201-202)

All three have been engaged with the Belgrade Circle — Derrida came to Belgrade in support of independent Serbian intellectuals in 1993, despite international sanctions against the Serbian regime — so his visit provoked anger and dismay in many Western intellectual circles. His critique of “phallogocentrism” is readily acknowledged as an important influence by feminist authors like Hélène Cixous (his text is a Foreword in Cixous 1994). Baudrillard criticized and ridiculed Western media manipulation in and around events such as the Gulf War. More recently, he has been a point of reference (and an object of criticism) in an article by a Slovenian feminist scholar Alenka Švab (1996b).

<sup>290</sup> Cf. Seremetakis (1994: 110): “Many male gender experts have exploited this instant authorisation to colonise the representation of women.”

## BEYOND OTHERNESS: MEN AND FEMINISM

(...) male feminists are the most virile of all.

Marit Paulsen<sup>291</sup> (Theobald 1996: 7)

In this section, I will focus on the place of men in feminism. Do they have one? The question is a quite complicated one. If men and women are perceived to be absolute "others" to each *other*, if they are perceived to be fundamentally different, how can they function together? If they are intrinsically the same (if this Otherness is just a construction or a simulation, as Baudrillard [1996] would argue), what is the point in regarding them as different? The question of the role and presence of men is a very difficult one for the "mainstream" feminist theories exemplified by Lovibond (1989) or Hartsock (1987). Slovenian feminist authors, on the other hand, seem to me to be much more open in their inclusion of men and men-related issues within the context of feminist studies.

Men seem to be in a highly ambivalent position when they converse (or argue, or just make their point) with proponents of feminist theories. They seem to be both encouraged to participate and discuss some issues related to gender identity and difference (as a sign of the greater inclusiveness of different women's groups), and at the same time to stay away from things (that they are told) they cannot possibly understand (reiterating an exclusivity of "women only" groups). Unlike places like Macedonia or Slovenia (where "male feminist" sounds like a contradiction in terms),<sup>292</sup> Western academic circles have been much more open to male input in the

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<sup>291</sup> Voted European Woman of the Year 1996.

<sup>292</sup> Having said that, I have to note that my friend Ljuba Stojić (now deputy editor of the weekly magazine *NIN* in Belgrade) was mockingly labelled "the first Serbian male feminist" in the early 1970s. The label was meant to be insulting, but Ljuba was (and still is) quite proud of his raising of some questions regarding place and role of women. One of the leading Serbian opposition figures,



areas of study regarded as "feminist" or, more broadly, "gender-related." Having said that, I have to note that there is only one male contributor in each of the volumes edited by Teresa Del Valle (1993) and Vigdis Broch-Due, Ingrid Rudie and Tone Bleie (1993). At the feminist conference I recently (March 1996) attended in St. Andrews,<sup>293</sup> there were not more than two men in the audience at any time.

There are obviously certain (feminist) issues (primarily related to the feminine "body politics") where men can say very little or nothing. The majority of men cannot perceive the constant exclusion that women face throughout their lives. Through biology, men are presumed to have access to an exclusive and élite club, where all the important decisions are made. Of course, aspects of gender bias are also culturally constructed; it is a fact that the former (communist) Yugoslavia was a male-dominated society, but still, a (male) friend of mine was absolutely shocked at the level of sexism incorporated in American business circles when he moved to New York in 1991. It can be argued that discussing gender discrimination could not possibly be done by men, since they seem to be in a position of domination in most Western societies, so it is hardly realistic to expect that men would willingly give away the power(s) that society bestows on them. On the other hand, the problem of discrimination and oppression is also a relative one; studies by Berlin sociologist Birgit Rommelspacher showed that women are quite capable of discriminating against others (both women and men) based on racial differences (Zaviršek 1995: 18).

The question of men in feminism or men and feminism is part of a much broader one, regarding scientific and any scholarly endeavor as (until quite recently) essentially "male" or "androcentric." Writing about the feminist critique of science, Clifford Geertz remarked that its success will depend

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Dragomir Olujić (secretary of the SDSS/J), is closely associated with the Belgrade feminist group "Women in Black."

<sup>293</sup> The conference "Engendering Debate" was organized by Dr. Lesley McDowell and held at the Department of English, University of St. Andrews, on March 16, 1996.

most critically on how the tension gets resolved between the moral impulses of feminism, the determination to correct the gender-based injustice and secure for women the direction of their lives, and the knowledge-seeking ones of science, the no-less-impassioned effort to understand the world as it, free of wishing, "really is."

(Geertz 1990: 23)

Feminist approaches are part of our (scholarly, anthropological, cultural, etc.<sup>294</sup>) everyday "reality." They cannot be ignored or just bypassed. The problem that men face is whether they have the right to discuss problems that they never actually experienced (marginalization, exclusion, sex discrimination, and so on). Of course, as pointed out by scholars like Henrietta Moore (1988: 4-11, 1994b: 2), the attitude "it takes one to know one" is not a serious option — it would definitely make disciplines like anthropology impossible or irrelevant. On the other hand, this attitude is present among many feminist scholars — Dagenais (1987), Ule (1988: 54), Probyn (1988), Lovibond (1989), Bondi and Domosh (1992), and Chapman (1996) specifically mention feminists *as women only*. The only country which included men in their delegation at the 1995 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing was Sweden. According to the Slovenian sociologist Darja Zaviršek, Sweden has reached the stage where men contemplate their masculinity in the same way as women try to define their femininity<sup>295</sup> — the question of gender roles in society is something that *both* men and women<sup>296</sup> can expect to address. As put by Mirjana Ule (1988: 54), men must question the universality of their own (gendered) position in society,<sup>297</sup> and this would enable them to reevaluate their own roles. Ule believes that this

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<sup>294</sup> A good recent example is Sam Raimi's Western *The Quick and the Dead*, where the archetypal "good guy" and the savior of a little Western town is a woman, played by Sharon Stone. This movie is a brilliant example of postmodern subversion and playing with clichés (male toughness vs. female sensitivity), while unexpectedly twisting them at the end.

<sup>295</sup> In the interview published in *Mladina* No. 39, September 26, 1995, p. 31.

<sup>296</sup> I do not wish to imply that I consider men and women to be the only two genders within any society — the same goes for hermaphrodites, transsexuals, and so on.

<sup>297</sup> She uses somewhat general terminology; "society" here means "Western societies."

reevaluation would help feminism as well — in fact, the future of feminism is in the inclusion of *both men and women* in its different aspects and approaches.

One of the anthropologists that ventured into the exploration of iconography related to masculinity was Eduardo Archetti from the University of Oslo. He has explored the images of masculinity as constructed through the Argentinian tango (1994: 109 ff). The lyrics of tango seem to revolve around the theme of romantic love. “[T]he basic elements in the cultural construction of romantic love are intimacy, companionship (friendship), the existence of mutual empathy and the search for sexual pleasure” (1994: 111). There is a perception of a balance between these elements, so if one of them gets too much emphasis, the whole edifice of romantic love can be destroyed. Romantic love is presented as a sort of mirror in which the main protagonist (a man) sees himself. If one element (like passion, for example) gets distorted, the mirror shatters.

Tango emphasizes the importance of “pure” or “true” love — the example of which is the mother/son relationship (“the narrator is always a son, never a father” [Archetti 1994: 112]). It also emphasizes *honor* (which is, curiously enough, “very dependent on the woman’s sexual behaviour” [1994: 115]). However, tango also presented (from the 1920s onwards) ways of rebelling against dominant narratives which emphasized “domestic love,” marriage and family as the ultimate values, and some sort of a “sacralization” of family space.<sup>298</sup> Tango reinvented romantic love in this period, and it was seen as a way of escaping these official moral codes by both feminists and suffragists. The relationship between men and women was presented as multifaceted: a woman was feared and at the same time desired. She presented the seeds of (man’s) potential destruction, yet she could at the same time liberate him from the chains of everyday life. Romantic love was compared to “pure” love. “Pure” love based on chastity was something worth striving for, yet its value could

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<sup>298</sup> Compare this with the chapter “Gender, identity and rights: Mothers, fathers, and the rest in Slovenia.”

not have been fully understood unless one experienced romantic love with all its potential dangers. The whole set of relationships between men and women was perceived as extremely complex and loaded with different meanings — and it is important to stress that the female characters in tango are extremely strong, self-aware and self-confident personalities.

Of course, if we are to accept the more general questions within feminism (that is to say, the ones regarding the meaning and status of “masculinity” as well as “femininity”), feminism probably leads right into the more general field of gender studies. In Eva Bahovec’s words (also the title of Tania Modleski’s book): “*Feminism without women.*” The same phrase has different meaning for these two scholars; for Bahovec (as well as many of her Slovenian colleagues<sup>299</sup>), it means rejecting the (essentialist) notion of women as mere *objects* — and putting in its place what she calls a *void symbolic subjectivity* as a means of expression (see Bahovec 1995). This subjectivity (in all its aspects) will be different in substance to a similarly conceived male subjectivity — but it will deal with similar questions. Modleski, on the other hand, warns against what she calls:

the subsumption of feminism within a “more comprehensive” field of gender studies, accompanied by the rise of “male feminist perspective that excludes women,” and the dominance within feminist thought of an “anti-essentialism so radical that every use of the term ‘woman,’ however ‘provisionally’ it is adopted, is disallowed” ([Modleski 1991:] 14-15). The two trends are linked, Modleski argues, because “the rise of gender studies is linked to, and often depends for its justification on, the tendency within poststructuralist thought to dispute notions of identity and the subject”. (15) These trends are troubling for Modleski because she fears that, insofar as gender studies tend to decenter women as the subjects of feminism, they may be not a

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<sup>299</sup> Primarily, members of the Center for Women’s Studies at the Pedagogical Institute in Ljubljana. Apart from Eva Bahovec, they are: Milica Antić, Zalka Drglin, Svetlana Slapšak and Valerija Vendramin.

“new phase” in feminism but rather feminism’s “phase out”  
([Modleski 1991:] 5).

(Chapman 1996)

In her article “Male pro-feminism and the masculinist gigantism of *Gravity’s Rainbow*,” Wes Chapman argues that, although not all “male-authored gender criticism” is anti-essentialist (her synonym for poststructuralist and postmodern), there is an important and very significant overlap between anti-essentialism and male-authored works:

Anti-essentialism is both symptom and cause of a deep anxiety which I take to underlie much gender criticism written by men today, an anxiety about being a male subject in a society in which male subjectivity has been identified as a problem. On the one hand, an awareness of the social construction of the self can lead to a heightened anxiety in men about gender, as it implies an awareness of the complicity of male subjectivity with social structures which are oppressive to women. On the other hand, male anxiety about gender can encourage an anti-essentialist viewpoint, both because anti-essentialism appears to offer hope that positive changes in gender identity are possible and because anti-essentialism can diffuse personal responsibility by shifting the object of critique from the self to social codes which have “always already” constructed the self.

(Chapman 1996)

Overall, Chapman seems to argue that while women immediately “know” what they are (i.e., they are constantly marginalized and socialized into accepting this as a “natural thing,” men are now belatedly “discovering” (or “rediscovering”) their own subjectivity. Her point of view (as well as the one by Modleski [1991] and Lovibond [1989]) seems to be radically essentialist, and Slovenian scholars, for example, would strongly disagree with it. Following Simone de Beauvoir, and Judith Butler more recently (1990), they would say that just as one “becomes a woman,” one also “*becomes a man*.”



The effects of socialization and domesticization cannot be underestimated in favor of some universal "essence" — for example, from an early age, girls are taught to sit in such a way to use as little space as possible, making them almost *invisible* (Bahovec 1996). A recent study of medical discourses reveals to what extent even biologically-centered attitudes towards gender were and still are a *social construct* (Findlay 1995). At the same time, one should bear in mind that images of masculinity depend on time and space — an overview by Nickola Pazderic (1995) shows the (politically related and politically inspired) ways in which these images were shaped in the US during the 1980s (the imagery of the "hard body").

In the interview conducted in 1989, Jean Baudrillard proposed a strategy of seduction as the way of overcoming strains and conflicts that arise in gender relations. He saw this strategy as "a happy, liberating power for women" (Gane 1993: 154). In another interview, Baudrillard remarks:

Seduction is a subversive power, it makes it possible to have mastery over that secret rule of the game, mastery not of power relations but another type of relationship. In that sense, nobody has won and nobody has lost. It would be too easy to say that men have won that age-old struggle. The feminists need the ancestral female woe in order to exist. They have defined themselves as movements in relation to what they claim from society. It is vital for them to have that their woe has always existed and will always exist.

(Gane 1993: 47)

"One must rise above the battle of the sexes," Baudrillard remarked in the same interview. Rather than taking the otherness of men and women as something "given," Baudrillard (1996) sees this differentiation as constructed (artificial), as one of the by-products of the whole concept of Modernity.<sup>300</sup> He calls it "a masculine

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<sup>300</sup> And this puts him in conflict with the authors like Felski (1989), Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen (1989), Gordon (1993), or Benhabib (1995).



hysteria,"<sup>301</sup> which influences a change in sexual paradigms. So, according to Baudrillard:

During this hysterical phase, it is to a certain extent the femininity of men that is projected onto women and shapes them as ideal figures of likeness. Romantic love is no longer about winning over a woman's heart, or about seducing her. It is rather a matter of creating her from inside, of inventing her, either as a realized utopia (an idealized woman), or as a "femme fatale," a star, which is yet another hysterical and supernatural metaphor.

(Baudrillard 1996)

In sharp contrast to feminist scholars like Marilyn Strathern (for example, 1987a), Baudrillard demands the abolishment of this idea of Otherness.<sup>302</sup> In his view, it is the very idea that there is something Other (radically different) from "us" that provokes the most violent and most senseless responses.<sup>303</sup> In typically irreverent style, he therefore observes that: "Feminism is in fact an example of hystericization of the masculine by women, a hysterical projection of their masculinity which follows exactly the hysterical projection by men of their femininity in the mythical image of a woman" (1996). I have to note here that I do see some feminist authors (like Luce Irigaray in her writings on equality, quoted in the previous chapter) as actually agreeing with this last statement. I would not go that far. Feminism is an important discourse that questions certain dominant narratives that have to do with power and inequality. Therefore, it is important for anthropology

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<sup>301</sup> Lane Lawley (1994) criticizes his use of the word "hysteria" — but I think that this is more than anything Baudrillard's subtle way of arguing with some of Foucault's ideas about the body.

<sup>302</sup> This is a very different reading of Baudrillard than the one by Lane Lawley 1994. Of course, I have to note that the text quoted here ("Plastic surgery for the Other") was only published in French in 1994.

<sup>303</sup> He uses the example of racism: "Logically, racism should have diminished thanks to Enlightenment's progress. But, the more we know that a genetic theory of race is unfounded, the more racism is reinforced" (Baudrillard 1996).

(Moore 1988), and, following arguments by Coombe (1991), I see postmodern approaches as their most obvious meeting point.

## AN AWKWARD CASE OF FEMINISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Now more than ever we know just how little is known about women.  
(...) We have in fact plenty of data 'on women.' (...) What is needed,  
I will suggest, is not so much data as questions (...) what we *can* know  
now will be determined by the kind of questions we learn to ask.

(Rosaldo 1980; quoted by Dagenais 1987: 19)

From the late 1960s, feminist studies begin to establish themselves within anthropology (Mathieu 1991a: 275). Feminist concerns were always present, but not necessarily noted, mostly because of a specific androcentric bias in research. Women were considered "mute" — but mostly because anthropologists did not bother asking them about their opinions (Moore 1988: 3-4). Cultural stereotypes regarding gender were just accepted, without inquiring what they *really* meant and whether men and women in any given society actually *acted* according to these stereotypes (Moore 1986; see also chapter on Macedonia, above). Perhaps in some cases it can be said that people *acted* according to anthropologists' expectations — being polite hosts, they did not want to offend visitors from afar by disagreeing with the "mental image" that their visitors already had about them.

Feminism and anthropology both rely on the notion of difference. Differences within and between cultures were one of the primary triggers of anthropological and ethnographic research (cf. MacCormack and Strathern 1980, as well as Ortner and

Whitehead 1981). Differences between the genders<sup>304</sup> (and the effective subjugation of women in Western cultures) is the main trigger of feminism. How do these approaches to difference combine in what can be called feminist anthropology?

Perhaps a question of terminology can be inserted here: can there be a feminist anthropology? Is feminist anthropology just a first step in the development of the anthropology of gender (or even gendered anthropology)? Henrietta Moore, while outlining the development of feminist approaches in anthropology in great detail, seems a bit ambiguous on this point:

Probably the most outstanding contribution feminist anthropology has made to the discipline has been the development of theories relating to gender identity and the cultural construction of gender, of what it is to be a 'woman' or a 'man'. This has come to be called the 'anthropology of gender', and it is a field of research which did not exist and could not have existed before the advent of a feminist anthropology.

(Moore 1988: 187)

So does one come before the other? Is feminist anthropology a logical precursor of the anthropology of gender or the other way around? Moore makes a distinction between the anthropology of gender (which she defines as "the study of gender identity and its cultural construction" [1988: 188]) and feminist anthropology ("the study of gender as a principle of human social life" [*ibid.*]). Although the anthropology of gender is not a sub-discipline of feminist anthropology, they both seem to share a concern "with the cultural construction of gender and gender identity" (Moore 1988: 188).

The main difference seems to be that feminist anthropological approaches<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> I stress again that, following Moore (1988), Butler (1990, 1993), and Grant (1993), I do not think that there are only two genders.

<sup>305</sup> Huguette Dagenais (1987: 21) uses term "approaches" instead of methodology, which is followed by Mathieu (1991a). I think that the use of this term is very convenient because it stresses *plurality*.

are about considering things "from a woman's point of view."<sup>306</sup> But how does one get to this "point of view"? Throughout her book (*Feminism and Anthropology*), Moore shows the impossibility of speaking *with a single voice* in the name of women and representing women (a point of hers taken in Slovenian feminist research, primarily by Darja Zaviršek [1991, 1995]). The way out of this paradoxical situation<sup>307</sup> seems to be to posit feminist anthropology as being aware of the "fundamental differences between women — whether based on class, race, culture or history — and that difference[s] is [are] something which needs to be theorized" (Moore 1988: 192).<sup>308</sup>

However, this does not really answer the question of what "a woman's perspective" is. Any perspective by any woman? Feminist authors from former Yugoslavia are sometimes quite annoyed by what they call "Western feminist ignorance" of their situation (cf. the example quoted in Smejkalová-Strickland 1995). Would one have to be a woman to have this point of view? Is a specific perspective ("the way of looking at things") of a Macedonian woman who disapproved of her younger son's marriage because her older son still wasn't married the same (or similar) to the one of a Slovenian unemployed woman staying at home and taking care of her 5-year old son? Is a point of view of a Slovenian feminist intellectual similar or different from both? Does my attitude as a white non-Western heterosexual quasi-academic male writing against all forms of gender discrimination identify me as a non-feminist or anti-feminist (not having a "woman's point of view") because I am not a woman? Is this point of view limited to biological females only? (If so, then it slips into some form of biological essentialism.) Are transsexuals who

<sup>306</sup> According to Moore (1988: 188), "feminism is all about the women's perspective."

<sup>307</sup> And for anthropologists like Marilyn Strathern (1988, 1991), this "way out" is not a very convincing one.

<sup>308</sup> Moore switches from the plural ("fundamental differences") to the singular ("that difference"). I think that the plural would be more in accord with the overall arguments of her book. For example, a few pages later (1988: 196), she writes: "I do not think that we can necessarily establish the primacy of one form of difference over others."

are *biologically* male capable of it? What about transsexuals who are *biologically* female?

This way of describing “a woman’s perspective” would require *defining* what a “man” and what a “woman” is. But Moore cites numerous ethnographic examples which show the fluidity and instability of these categories. The whole argument of Judith Butler’s book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) focuses exactly on this impossibility.

Butler also takes anthropology into account; in her opinion, Mary Douglas provided a groundbreaking study in her *Purity and Danger* (1966), in pointing to the importance of a symbolic understanding of the body and especially of what happens around the boundaries of the body. Douglas had already criticized concepts that took for granted the “naturalness” of the body (Butler 1990: 131-133). The body was where the flux and instability were focused; so what gender one was was determined primarily by what gender one *performed*. For Butler, the body is “a set of boundaries, individual and social, politically signified and maintained” (1990: 33). She continues:

No longer believable as an interior “truth” of dispositions and identity, sex will be shown to be a performatively enacted signification (and hence not “to be”), one that, released from its naturalized interiority and surface, can occasion the parodic proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings.

(Butler, *ibid.*)

Gender in the sense of sexual identity is, however, usually assumed to be a “natural thing.” For example, if one sees a man or a woman,<sup>309</sup> one automatically (“naturally”) ascribes male or female sexual identity to them. However, sexuality — including female sexuality — is a synthetic (*man-made/artificial*) thing. As Butler would say: “As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*” (1990: 140). There is nothing “natural” about gender

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<sup>309</sup> Or, more precisely, what is *within a specific culture* perceived to be a man or a woman.

identity and there is nothing “natural” about the positions that one might take regarding and based on one’s gender identity. Gender cannot be constituted as a stable identity (or even a stable category), since it is “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (*ibid.*). Furthermore, “[g]enders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically *incredible*” (1990: 141).

According to another author who calls the perceived essentialist categories into question, Teresa De Lauretis (1984, 1987, 1994), gender is first of all a “representation” — which is secondly its own “construction” (“the construction is both — the product and the process of representation and self-representation”). This construction in the third place occurs *daily* and *continuously* through social and cultural discourse (for example, in the media<sup>310</sup>) and paradoxically, gender is forcefully also influenced by its “deconstruction.” According to De Lauretis, the preoccupation with the differences between men and women has unnecessarily limited feminist discussion. Therefore, she writes:

The first limit of “sexual difference(s),” then, is that it constrains feminist critical thought within the conceptual frame of a universal sex opposition (woman as the difference from man, both universalized; or woman as difference *tout court*, and hence equally universalized), which makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the differences among women from Woman, that is to say, the differences among women or, perhaps more exactly, the differences *within women*. (...) A second limitation of the notion of sexual difference(s) is that it tends to recontain or recuperate the radical epistemological potential of feminist thought inside the walls of the master’s house, to borrow Audre Lorde’s metaphor rather than Nietzsche’s “prison-house of language” (...) By radical epistemological potential I mean the

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<sup>310</sup> See the interplay of representations and images outlined in the section “I sing the body electric...” in the previous chapter.



possibility (...) to conceive of the social subject and of the relations of subjectivity to sociality in another way: a subject constituted in gender, to be sure, though not by sexual difference alone, but rather across languages and cultural representations; a subject en-gendered in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual relations; a subject, therefore, not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted.

(De Lauretis 1987: 2)

Following (and extending) Beauvoir's phrase that one *becomes* a gender (1990: 33, 111-127), Butler offers a devastating critique of ideas and concepts based on "naturalness" and "inherent" or "universal" properties. She also criticizes feminist positions that generalize and universalize a "unified" subject of feminism:

The feminist "we" is always and only a phantasmatic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent. (...) The radical instability of the category sets into question the *foundational* restrictions on feminist political theorizing and opens up other configurations, not only of genders and bodies, but of politics itself.

(1990: 142)

By accepting the consequences that there are no fixed categories associated with gender and identity, Butler thinks that the critical task of feminism is to examine different gender categories as the sites of instability. All of these sites ("male," "female," "queer," "lesbian," etc.) present the potential for subversion and democratization (cf. Butler 1993: 229). And it is this subversion that enables the very postmodern questioning of dominant narratives regarding gender.

There are several narratives (the sex/gender distinction,<sup>311</sup> the "naturalness" of gender categories, "male" and "female" as universal cross-cultural categories)

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<sup>311</sup> Cf. Moore (in Broch-Due, Rudie and Bleie 1993: 281-282): "(...) it is not necessary for feminist theorists to hold a radical distinction between sex and gender."

which work by both Moore and Butler<sup>312</sup> renders obsolete. Critical feminist (or “postfeminist” [1990: 5]) theory as perceived by Butler takes feminist anthropology as perceived by Moore as a natural ally. In fact, I think that Moore (1994b: 36-42) is basically taking the same (decentered and decentering) perspective as Butler.

However, this still does not mean that contemporary feminist theoreticians are happy with the abolishment of universal categories (like “woman”) as the subject of their discourse. If they want to be “in touch” with contemporary culture (as exemplified in Western media representations which are widely accepted by people across cultural and gender divisions), they have to locate themselves in this maze of mirrors. The problem of contemporary feminist theory, as I see it, is that it looks for a fixed image (a single mirror) that would reflect who “feminism” really represents and what ~~is~~ <sup>it</sup> all about. This can never be done, because contemporary feminism, like all of us, has entered into the hall of mirrors, the age of mass-communications, technological wonders, mass media and popular culture. The mirrors are multiple and the images distorted. How can we know what the “real” image is and how a “real” gender category looks like? Well, we cannot. We have to learn to live with multiple images and multiple possibilities of representation.

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<sup>312</sup> More precisely, the interpretations that they provide. I do not wish to imply that Moore and Butler would necessarily consider their work to be methodologically connected or that they influenced each other.

## COPING WITH DIFFERENCES: FROM ALICE TO TANK GIRL

Multiple forms of difference — race, class, gender, sexuality — intersect within individuals, and identity is therefore premised on difference. The pressing task for the anthropology of the future is that we must begin to acknowledge the differences within rather than simply the differences between.

(Moore 1993: 204)

Henrietta Moore's recent work (especially 1994*b*) is oriented towards stressing the importance of difference(s). In doing so, she brings closer postmodernism and anthropology. Of course, I do not wish to imply that she would ever refer to herself as a "postmodern anthropologist."<sup>313</sup> However, as I have shown above, critics of postmodernism frequently equate it with poststructuralism. Where feminist authors are concerned, there is sometimes a feeling of solidarity, even when the authors disagree. To give one example, Di Leonardo (1991*b*) does not criticize Moore by name — even though she criticizes Moore's whole theoretical approach! There are other critics of poststructuralist and postmodern approaches (like Lovibond 1989) who, while criticizing these approaches, will make sure not to include any *women* as objects of their criticism.

The problem is that for many feminist authors abolishment of the universal subject of feminism (the category of "woman") is something extremely threatening. Feminist theory has until quite recently assumed the existence of such a category and the existence of universal shared concerns between women. This was achieved with an implicit notion of what a "woman" was — primarily through a mere biological definition (which was in itself socially constructed [Findlay 1995]!). The universal

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<sup>313</sup> In fact, she points to some risks involved in the postmodern anthropological production of texts (Moore 1994*b*, Chapter 6).

category of "woman" was positioned as a metanarrative that was explaining all the other narratives of feminism. A "feminist position" was constructed as a specific site, a place where only women could find themselves.

It seems to me that this was like tying one in a chair in front of a mirror. The mirror never moved. The chair never moved. The image was stable and constant. The trouble arose when the person (a "woman," actually!) wanted to get up from the chair, tired and perhaps bored of the same image. What she discovered was other rooms (even ones that she could call "a room of her own"), and open spaces. In a sense, it is "safer" being in a secure, enclosed space, but it is hard to see anyone wanting to be there all the time.

Anthropology by its very definition (as a study of other cultures as well as our own) shatters this stable, "safe" image. Ethnographic data provide sufficient material for cross-cultural comparisons and clearly provide specific examples of differences. The more radical this approach gets, the more it aligns itself with what I call postmodern approaches.

In the chapter "The other side of the window: Gender, equality and difference in Prespa, Republic of Macedonia," I have shown how a certain stable image of dominant men and subordinate women shows cracks. When more closely examined, the situation in Prespa seems to be one where men and women are interdependent and actually stand in a relationship of *complementarity*, not domination and subordination. This still does not mean *equality*, and I do take into account criticism of recent Mediterranean studies (especially dealing with the material from Greece) by Nadia Seremetakis (1994), who writes:

This model of gender complementarity [as described in the volume edited by Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991, for example] and social totality presumes a homeostatic model of a social order to be a base-line condition from which all social processes originate and to which they return. Thus under the model of gender complementarity, acts of resistance or self-empowerment by women are role reversals or inversions. Such concepts as inversion and reversion always carry

within them a teleology of return, a swing back to the 'normal' condition.

(Seremetakis 1994: 109)

I do not wish to present the images from Prespa (based on my observed but also *lived* experiences) as universal, although I try to put them (whenever possible) in a wider context, not just in Macedonia, but also within the whole complex of South European/Mediterranean cultures. This is not *the* image of women in Prespa — this is just my presentation of it, my own narrative.<sup>314</sup> At the same time, there are specific women's rituals in Macedonia (like the "*blaga rakija*" [literally, "*sweet brandy*" ] — something that very loosely resembles what in Britain and the US is called "hen's party") about which I do not know anything.

Contemporary feminist discourses in Slovenia<sup>315</sup> remind me of Eco's *Name of the Rose*. What is a rose? Does it actually have a name? Similarly, what is feminism in Slovenia? Is it different from feminism elsewhere? While I present the situation in Prespa through a deconstruction of a master narrative and the construction of hyperreality, in Slovenia, I am more interested in the concept of differences. There are also master narratives to be deconstructed ("women as mothers"), but I found the differences in approaches between the feminists<sup>316</sup> and the "others"<sup>317</sup> really fascinating. Both feminism and anthropology were marginalized by the communist authorities between 1945 and the late 1980s, and both are trying to reestablish themselves now. Some of the most prominent authors of anthropological texts<sup>318</sup> in

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314 Of course, it is a narrative whose authenticity I am ready to defend, and it includes statements which I can corroborate with specific ethnographic examples.

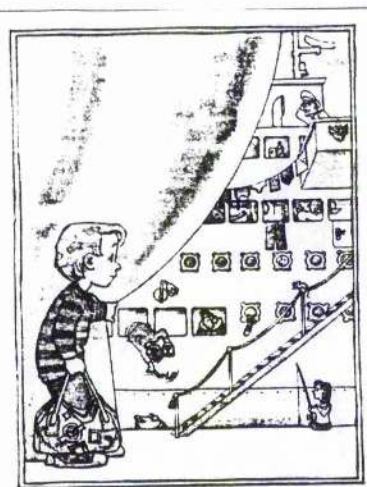
315 Chapters, "What's in a name?: Contemporary feminist discourses in the Republic of Slovenia" and "Gender, identity and rights: Mothers, fathers and the rest in Slovenia."

316 I include here men (for example, employed in the Institute for Humanistic Studies in Ljubljana) as well.

317 The majority of population.

318 I use this awkward phrase because not all the scholars writing about anthropology are anthropologists — Zaviršek, for example, is a sociologist.





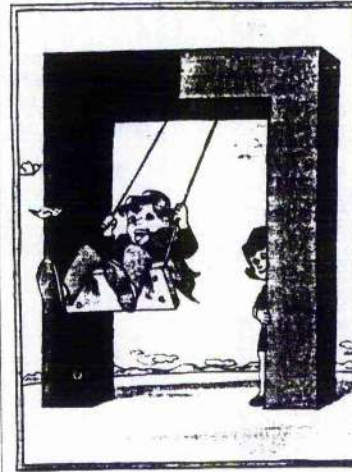
VSAKDAN JE PISAN PAJČOLAN



NA TURNIRJIH - BREZ BUŠK



VSE TO ČISTA JE RESNICA...



MAGNET JE VES SVET

**Fig. 3** Illustrations for the different sections of the fourth-grade Slovenian language textbook. Note how girls are depicted either crouching or hiding — in any case, taking as little space as possible; while boys are the ones having an “active life.” After Bahovec 1996: 111.



Slovenia can be readily described as feminist: Vesna Godina, Darja Zaviršek, Jana Rošker. Others, like Eva Bahovec, are very much engaged in debates about the politics of the body and gender representation — all of which are very relevant for contemporary anthropology. The same goes for research on educational discourses — are “girls” and “boys” really different in the way that they *learn* and *perform* at school (Dunne and Johnstone 1992; Hacker 1992; for the Slovenian perspective, Drglin in Bahovec 1993a; Bahovec 1996) — or are all these just different realities that are *inscribed* on children (by their teachers, environment, curriculum, end so on)? The educational discourses are rightly seen by Slovenian feminist scholars as an area where gender biases and stereotypes are formed and emphasized. If these stereotypes are going to be abolished (as I believe they should), one would have to start with children. In all of these areas of research, anthropological insights and feminist perspectives are combined.

My research has convinced me that not only is there no single feminist perspective in Slovenia — there is not even something that can be labelled “a woman’s point of view.” A “feminist perspective” in Slovenia always means a specific feminist speaking in a specific place (site) about a certain issue from (her) particular perspective. There are multiple voices and multiple representations, the sum of which represents specifically Slovenian discourses on gender.<sup>319</sup>

A postmodern emphasis on “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard) combines well with an insistence on the recognition of differences. Feminist theories have founded themselves on a number of “facts” related to gender difference, while at the same time trying to prove that their opponents’ “facts” related to gender difference are a mere delusion. This presents a problem in accepting postmodern approaches; on the one hand, questioning of the “facts” (or specific master narratives) would mean questioning the foundations of feminist theories themselves. On the

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<sup>319</sup> For the problems that Western feminists face when they try to use their generalized concepts in non-Western cultural contexts, see Larbalestier 1990 and Cooppan 1994.

other hand, it would (according to some feminist critics<sup>320</sup>) slip into an absolute cognitive relativism, where its own aims (like the abolishment of all forms of discrimination based on gender) would be symbolically of *equal value* as the aims of the patriarchally-dominated societies. Questioning of the foundations of feminist theories has begun by many Third World or minority scholars and authors (Trin Minh-ha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, bell hooks — to name just a few). The data provided by anthropology (Quinn 1977; Moore 1988), as well as calls for a dialogue *within* anthropology (Jennaway 1990; Haraway 1991; Strathern 1991), only furthers this erosion of the solid, stable, unmovable foundations of feminism. As far as the relativistic danger is concerned, I see both sorts of claims (the ones arguing against the discrimination and the ones arguing for its necessity) *equal* only in their *form*. Both type of claims are *narratives* — and that is as far as any relativism can go! I cannot see how narratives justifying *any* form of oppression can be defended from a moral point of view. Any form of oppression and discrimination is just plainly *wrong* — whether one is a postmodernist or not! I am unaware of any example of a postmodern thinker arguing for the *equality* between the oppressed and their oppressors — and feminist scholars taking this line of criticism should be able to present some if they want to make their point.

“The pressing task for the anthropology of the future” that Moore refers to in the quote at the beginning of this section is most easily realized through the postmodern anthropology of gender. Or: an anthropology of difference.

I have already outlined above (mostly in the chapter “Postmodernism, anthropology and common sense”) some of the misunderstandings regarding postmodern approaches.<sup>321</sup> In the hall of mirrors where contemporary researchers find themselves, it sometimes appears that “Postmodernism” is some ferocious

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<sup>320</sup> Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen 1989; Gordon 1993, etc.

<sup>321</sup> I have also tried to show how postmodern approaches actually have a long history, and how some things (“culture as texts”) criticized for the “postmodernity” in contemporary anthropology, were actually present long before this term was in the popular usage.

monster that is just waiting for the opportunity to destroy them. The idea of everything being open to questioning is the one of a world which is unstable and constantly changing. It is difficult to accept the world of uncertainties.

Donna Haraway proposes a cyborg as something capable of dealing with these uncertainties. In her words, "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (1991: 149). This hybrid also presents "a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation. (...) The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world" (1991: 150). This option may encourage one to take advantage of the flux and instabilities in boundaries (such as the ones opened up by the new technologies), as well as provide for a total abolishment of a biologically-centered matrix of gender and gender relations. The concept of the *cyborg* seems easier to grasp than total absence, total potentiality (cf. Bahovec 1995). But I think that it is (*essentially*) the same thing.

The consequences of not accepting the changes that postmodern approaches to gender bring are simply missing the world around us. It would be like staring at the same reflection in the mirror, over and over again, without ever wishing to get up and see whether there is something different, some new image. The danger is that in accepting metanarratives (even when they have been proven false — as much as one can prove anything) and ignoring the differences, contemporary anthropologists studying gender might find themselves trapped, just as Alice found herself always walking back through the door of the Looking Glass House, no matter what part of the magic garden she had hoped to reach (Carroll 1992*b*). It is much easier to gain a *better* understanding of the world around us if we accept the inherent *instability* of both "the world" and our own perceptions of it. It will still be possible and desirable to produce narratives about this world, but without claims to absolute truth or absolute certainty.

The "magic garden" that Alice tried to reach can be an understanding of others (as well as ourselves as others). Again, the work of Butler (1990, 1993, 1995), as well as Strathern (1991) and Moore (1988, 1994*b*) opens numerous possibilities and viewing perspectives. By accepting some tools provided by postmodern approaches, the contemporary anthropology of gender should provide means for the elimination of all forms of gender discrimination by pointing out the falseness (and actual *impossibility*) of the master narratives on which discrimination is based. Different genders will enter into the anthropologists' field of vision, as well as new symbols of this age of technology, like the self-conscious Tank Girl. I am not quite sure how some feminist anthropologists (like Seremetakis 1994) would react to the fact that this icon of femininity in the 1990s is a product of (the artwork by) two men (Hewlett and Martin 1995; also Bošković 1995)—but it would definitely add to the notion of flux, paradox and instability. And that is what the contemporary anthropology of gender is all about.

# Appendix:

## Translation of the Slovenian Maternity Leave Law\*

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\* This translation is based on Švab 1995: 49-53. She omitted the Article 79, because it actually deals with night work and not with maternity leave.

# THE PROTECTION OF MATERNITY AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS WHO CARE FOR CHILDREN

## Article 76

Employed female workers have the right to special protection during pregnancy, during the delivery and with regards to maternity.

Types of work which affect health and psycho-physical abilities of women in a harmful way are defined by a special law, issued by the Republic [of Slovenia] administrative agency in charge of health care. Women should not take up these jobs, especially during pregnancy.

## Article 77

If it is necessary to move a pregnant woman to another work place, she has the right to the same salary as she would have at the previous work place — except in the case where the salary at the new work place is higher.

## Article 78

A female worker with a child aged one to three years can be asked to work overtime or during the night only with her previous consent.

## Article 80

A female worker has the right to a total of 365 days of the maternity leave and child care leave.

A female worker can use this right in a form of paid leave of 105 days before the delivery, and after the delivery she has a right to a child care leave of 260 days — or she can work part-time until the child is 17 months old.



## Article 81

A female worker who gives birth to twins or to more children at the same time, or to a physically disabled or mentally handicapped child, or to a premature child, has longer child care than stated in a second paragraph of the previous article of this law.

If a female worker cares for a seriously physically disabled or mentally handicapped child, or twins, she is entitled to a paid leave until a child [or children] is [are] 15 months old. Regarding care of multiple birth children, a female worker has the right to an additional 3 months leave for each further child.

If a female worker takes an option of part-time work, she has the right to do so until her physically disabled or mentally handicapped child, or twins, is [are] 23 months old. For every further child, she has the right to additional 5 months of this leave.

If a female worker cares for a premature child, the longer child care leave lasts as many more weeks as the pregnancy was shorter than 37 weeks — in the case of full absence from work.

If a female worker takes an option of part-time work, she has the right to use longer child care leave for a prematurely born child in such a way that she works part-time. The exact duration of longer leave in this case is determined when considering the number of weeks for which pregnancy was shorter than 37 weeks and in accordance to a planned working hours schedule in the female worker's company or employer.

## Article 82

The way in which child care leave is used as described in the previous two articles, is defined by a special law issued by the Republic [of Slovenia] administrative agency in charge of the protection of family, in agreement with the Republic [of Slovenia] administrative agency for labor.

## Article 83

A female worker who uses maternity and child care leave in a way described in Articles 80 and 81 of this law has the right to a subsidy for salary in accordance with the law.

## Article 84

A female worker has the right to work part-time until her child is 3 years old if a child needs additional care. This is determined by the Republic [of Slovenia] administrative agency in charge of health care.

A female worker referred to in the previous paragraph has the right to a salary according to her actual work and other rights in accordance with the special law.

## Article 85

One of the parents who care for a more physically disabled or mentally handicapped child has the right to work part-time.

In such a case, a worker has the right to a salary according to his/her actual work and other rights in accordance with the special law.

## Article 86

The rights from Article 45, the right to child care from Article 80, and the rights from the Articles 81, 84 and 85 of this law are exercised by a worker-father of the child if there is an agreement with mother-worker. The right from the aforementioned articles as well as from Article 78 of this law are also held by a worker-father of the child or by the worker who cares for the child in the case of mother's death, if she leaves, or if she is temporary or permanently incapable of independent life and work — the latter being determined by the competent health institution.

A worker-father of the child or by the worker who cares for the child in the case of mother's death, if she leaves, or if she is temporary or permanently incapable of independent life and work — the latter being determined by the competent health institution — also has a right to a maternity leave reduced for as many days as used up by a mother, but not less than 28 days.

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\* The years in square brackets denote 1/ the first publication of the book or article; 2/ the date when the article included in a book was originally published or presented; or 3/ (in case of translations) the date of the publication in the original language.

\*\* Electronic Typescript or ETS is how I refer to the articles obtained or exclusively distributed through the electronic media, including e-mail and the Internet.

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